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KING JOHN
IN FACT AND FICTION

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A THESIS

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Introductory

A LITTLE less than one hundred years after the death of King John, a Scottish Prince John changed his name, upon his accession to the throne and at the request of his nobles, to avoid the ill omen which darkened the name of the English king and of John of France. A century and a half later, King John of England was presented in the first English historical play as the earliest English champion and martyr of that Protestant religion to which the spectators had newly come. The interpretation which thus depicted him influenced in Shakespeare's play, at once the greatest literary presentation of King John and the source of much of our common knowledge of English history. In spite of this, however, the idea of John now in the mind of the person who is no student of history is nearer to the conception upon which the old Scotch nobles acted. According to this idea, John is weak, licentious, and vicious, a traitor, usurper and murderer, an excommunicated man, who was compelled by his oppressed barons, with the Archbishop of Canterbury at their head, to sign Magna Charta. In story, he is a plotter against his glorious and magnanimous brother, and the pursuer of Matilda Fitzwalter, Maid Marian. History of the secondary schools has retained no deep impression of the French wars but has emphasized the horror of the excommunication and of John's absolute isolation during the time of it. Because of this, we read into Shakespeare what is in our own minds, making his King John weaker and worse than in fact he is; and Bale's *Kynge Johan* seems at first an invention out of the whole cloth, in its apparent turning of a universally execrated man into a hero.

But some essential germs of truth must underlie even such diverse conceptions. It is the object of this study, then, to examine the epic figure of King John from his earliest appearance in literature, in his own lifetime, down to the present day, and by comparison with the historical figure, to show where lie the roots of the various elements of the epic character, and to demonstrate that these elements are not fundamentally incompatible. Through this examination we shall, perhaps, come to understand why Magna Charta, which looms so large to us, did not appear in the Elizabethan plays, even the historical ones, and how one man became at once the martyr of Bale's play, the villain of the stories of Richard Coeur de Lion and of Robin Hood, and the rallying point of English patriotism, as he appears in Shakespeare's *King John*. To do this, it is necessary to study not only the veritable historical character, but also that character as understood at different times in sober history. For it is only recently that John's true strength and ability have been recognized. Among the failures of his career and the subtleties of a mind in some respects beyond his age, these traits were unknown to some of the best of the contemporary chroniclers, and to others were obscured by prejudice. The two studies, historical and epic, cannot be maintained independently; the delineations of John in contemporary literature influenced those of later history and these in turn reacted upon the literature contemporary with that history.

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The first material to be considered will be the contemporary chroniclers and historians to whom all followers must turn, however myth and bias may alter the interpretation. They have not the advantage of perspective, and they have, most of them, warm feelings engaged in the events they are describing, so that even there, judgment of John manifests the trend it will take in later history. This becomes even clearer in the historians, still original, of a little later date whom we are next to study, and in the early compilers. Besides these, we have the beginnings of a literary tradition in a number of short Latin, French and Provençal poems on current events, and in the exaggerated presentations of character and events found in the Norman-French *Historie de Guillaume le Maréchal*, in the long Latin poem of William the Breton, the *Philippidos*, and in the old French prose *Histoire des Ducs de Normandie et des Rois d'Angleterre*. Then after a long period during which nothing is recorded except a brief mention in the *Romance of Richard the Lion-Hearted* and the *Ballad of King John and the Bishop*, the figure of our study becomes prominent again in the work of Bale.

Bishop Bale's *Kynge Johan*, bringing an English King upon the stage for the first time, as the hero of a morality play, marks a great step in English drama; it is, at the same time, indicative of a renewed interest in English history, of which the Bishop himself was one of the chief promoters. Historians at that time went back to original sources, and *Holinshed* and *Stow*, breaking partly with tradition, give us history revived and enlightened by independent examination. To them the dramatists turned, and also, in the case of the romantic plays, to literary story and legend. There are six Elizabethan plays in which King John figures, of which the first two, the *Troublesome Raigne* in two parts, and Shakespeare's *King John* are historical plays in Bale's tradition, treating the history of John from his accession to his death. The romantic plays are, *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington* by Munday, the *Death of Robert Earl of Huntington* by Munday and Chettle, *Looke About You*, and Davenport's *King John and Matilda*. The first of these treats of the events in England during Richard's Crusade and imprisonment, centering about the romantic story of Robin Hood and Marian, and John's love for the latter; the second depicts Robin's death, John's passion for Matilda Fitzwalter (Marian) and the barons' war growing from it, with which is interwoven the story of the unhappy Matilda de Breuse; the third dramatizes a period preceding the death of Henry II, picturing Robert, Earl of Huntington, as a young ward of Prince Richard's, who has not yet known distress or exile; and the last play, beginning after the death of Robin Hood, follows Munday and Chettle in presenting the stories of Matilda Fitzwalter and of Lady Breuse.

The consideration of the Robin Hood plays has led to a subsidiary study. Besides the fact that four out of six plays treat John in connection with this hero and his love Marian, the popularity of the theme is attested in Drayton's celebration of the story of John and Matilda. Moreover, in later literature, with the exception of *Ivanhoe*, this romantic aspect of John, combined with his treachery to Richard, has been the sole subject of portrayal; and in quasi-literature, where he is not always the pursuer of Marian, he is, even more than the Sheriff of Nottingham, the villain

of the Sherwood idyll. Through the Robin Hood Saga, therefore, seemed one of the most natural methods of tracing King John. But, surprising as it may seem, in view of the strength of this connection, John does not appear in *any* of the Robin Hood Ballads; Marian herself, as the hero's companion, appears only in a few late ones; and Robin's title of nobility is also late. How came the story to be so firmly established? Major, in his *History of Britain*, is the first recorded narrator to put Robin Hood definitely in Richard's time. The growth of the firmly established connection with John seems impossible to trace with certainty; but the establishment once granted, some tentative suggestions may be made as to how this story was woven into the story of Matilda Fitzwalter, and that in turn, brought into relation with the story of the Breuses with such effective dramatic results.

Into the later appearances of King John it has not seemed necessary to examine with such detail. The character had, by Davenport's time, pretty well taken its form, and the further developments are easily understood. A few words may cover, for the purposes of this essay, the versions of Colley Cibber and Ducis, the work of Peacock, Scott and Mr. Alfred Noyes; and there would be little profit in studying minutely the wealth of popular versions, with slight pretence to literature, of Robin Hood.

1. Early History

If we would understand the John of literary tradition we must first envisage the real John as he appeared to historians of his own time and later. Though they may be biased, they present his life and character as fact, not as fiction. These chroniclers and annalists fall into three groups: those who record events as they happened; those who write long enough after the events they treat to have gained a perspective but who may have lived through the event and who may certainly have much original information from various sources; and lastly, compilers who, while rarely independent or individual, may give in a sense a broader view since they represent the body of fact as currently accepted.¹ The conception of John arrived at from this study affords a standard to which we can refer the several literary presentations of his figure and character and thereby understand their wide divergences.

Roger of Hovenden was from his connection with the court² in a position to hear facts directly and to judge them as a man of the world. His *Chronicle*³ is wholly original in the portion covering the years 1192-1201. Following Benedict of Peterborough as a source for the earlier years it touches briefly upon Henry's efforts to secure a rich inheritance for John, attributing the failure of John's Irish Expedition to his avarice, and pictures the grief of Henry at John's desertion. Through the early years of Richard's reign Hovenden's sympathy is with John as a focus of English sentiment against the chancellor, who "scorns in all things the English people;" but he distrusts John's temper, and when the news of Richard's capture comes adjudges him guilty of basest ingratitude—"Breaking the bond of brotherhood, he entered into a bond with death and a pact with Hell!" In this, and the events that follow however, John does not plan his villainy independently, but appears as a weakling at Philip of France's beck and call, and something of a sneak. Hovenden accepts the opinion of him reported to have been expressed by Richard at the news of his brother's treachery, the words of which he cites; "Johannes frater meus non est homo qui sibi vi terram subjiat si fuerit qui vim ejus vi saltem tenui repellat."

After doing homage to Philip, John tries to persuade the English that Richard is dead, but fails of belief and is prevented from bringing over foreign mercenaries. While both sides are hesitating comes Philip's word that the devil is unchained, and John flees to Normandy, there to continue plotting. Richard's re-establishment of his power on his return centres about the siege and capture of Nottingham from John's adherents, after which he sets out to see Clipston and the Forest of Sherwood, which he had never seen, and which pleased him much. At a council where, among others, David Earl of Huntingdon is present, Richard condemns

¹I have not included in this survey every historian of the reign of John, but all, I think, who are important in understanding the man as he was and as he was conceived.

²Roger was a confidential clerk of Henry II, with him in France in 1174, employed as a messenger to Fergus of Galloway in that year. In 1189 he was Justice in Itinere for forests of Northumberland, Cumberland and Yorkshire.

³Ed. Hewlett. Rolls Series, Vol. 51.

John; later however, through the Queen Mother, he becomes reconciled to him and on his deathbed solemnly makes him his heir.

Philip, angry as he says because John had taken Normandy without asking him, favors Arthur's claims but a peace is effected in 1200 with the marriage of Blanche and Lewis; and Arthur with Philip's consent does homage to John—on which follows this curious sentence: "*Sed Arturus traditione regis Angliae remansit in custodia regis Franciae.*" The Chronicle ends in 1201 with the scene laid for John's war with the Lusignans, but with peace between him and Philip.

Thus Roger of Hovenden concludes just where the great events of John's life begin. The true significance of Philip's attitude toward Arthur and of the great struggle about him had not yet revealed itself; Arthur seems unimportant, John's succession universally accepted. Neither is the force of John's mind and personality yet felt. He is seen as bad, cruel, but weak, untenacious, incapable of large plans; his treachery to Richard is made gratuitous, the result of a character malleable in the hands of Philip. For Hovenden, like others, fails to take account of a motive for John's action at this time, which, while it does not lessen his sin, at least excuses him from the charge of wanton stupidity in over-haste to reign. Arthur had been named as Richard's heir, and since John might and it seems really did believe at first that Richard would not return, his efforts were to secure the succession to himself against his nephew, not, primarily, to supplant his indulgent brother. But Hovenden is particularly interesting as giving a view of John's early character uncoloured by the light of later event.

Hovenden, under the year 1190, following Benedict of Peterborough, gives the so-called "Here Prophecy," which purports to have been just *found*, but which was as Hales¹ shows, invented at this time. When a certain event takes place, the English people shall be divided in three—one part going to Ireland, but too late, the second to Italy, the third part dwelling in misery at home. The first part has been referred to John's relation to Ireland, but is still blind.

Gervase of Canterbury, living and writing at Canterbury during the reigns of Henry, Richard and part of that of John, was in the direct path of travel for knowledge and gossip. The *Gesta Regum*² which bears his name is certainly his down to the year 1199, almost certainly through 1210. The continuator, who reverts to 1207 is possibly original for the period 1207-1217³.

Of John's rebellion, Gervase says only that he moved untimely sedition, despairing of Richard's return. Hurrying over the period from Richard's death to the marriage of Blanche and Lewis, he describes John after that as everywhere energetic in subduing rebels. In spite of the generally felt contempt, this chronicler realized John's true calibre:

Contempserunt etenim in eo malivoli quique juvenilem aetatem et corporis parvitatem, et quia prudentia magis quam pugna pacem optinebat ubique, "molle gladium" eum malivoli detractores et invidi deri-

¹Academy. Vol. 30, p. 380.

²Ed. Stubbs. Rolls Series, Vol. 73.

³The *Gesta* down to 1199 is an abridgement of Gervase's larger work. There is a break after 1210, in which year Gervase probably died, and the continuator starts at 1207 so that the years 1207-1210 are covered twice.

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sores vocabant. Sed processu temporis mollities illa in tantam crudelitatem versa est, ut nulli praedecessorum suorum coaequari valeret.¹

With the outbreak of war, John is described again as energetic and triumphant, fearing Philip less and less because the prisoners taken with Arthur are in England and Arthur shut up in close prison—*whence it was spread abroad through various countries that he had killed him with his own hand*. John's seeming inconsistency at this time in his appearing now vigorous, now unwarlike and feeble, Gervase explains by saying that he had scarcely a servant whom he could trust. Blaming him for the refusal to accept Langton, for the expulsion of the monks and for the persecution, Gervase ascribes these acts, however, to the influence of evil councillors. John's barons refuse to go against the King of Scots because of the Interdict. So far Gervase. The continuator describes hurriedly the submission, the barons' war, the Charter, the coming of Lewis and the death of John.

Gervase had no grasp of foreign affairs and was not interested in them. He pictures a John strong in England, a vigorous and efficient administrator of that realm, conqueror of Scotland and Wales. Though he finds him unqualifiedly wrong in the fight with Langton, he is on the whole sympathetic and feels an honest insular pride in an English king, who is, in himself, a better soldier than the French king.

Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum*,² is the work of a devout Benedictine of the Abbey of Coggeshall who judges events entirely by their effect on the Cistercians. At the time of Richard's captivity that king is to Ralph as to all others the great hero, and the historian inveighs against the Austrians with great feeling. But at the time of his death, he is characterized as a wordy man who will not be brought to God, one who took more money than any other king, however long he reigned.

John's rebellion and accession to the throne with the transactions up to the peace are passed over quickly, as in Gervase. At the time of the treaty in 1200, John seemed, says the chronicler, a lover of peace and resolved to live in peace. Then follows a long story, humanly told, of John's quarrel with the Cistercians of York over his pecuniary demands. An interesting glimpse of the king's personality is given when John refuses himself to tell them of his forgiveness, but bids the Archbishop of Canterbury speak for him. In 1202 the chronicle tells of the new war with the counts of March and Eu about Isabel of Angoulême, of Arthur's union with them, and of John's capture of all at Mirabel, by the will of God; of the defection of William de Roches and the nobles of Brittany when John refuses them the custody of Arthur. Then follows the version of the story of Arthur that is most important in literature and that has won general belief, also, in history:

Certain councillors of John's, seeing that there will never be peace while the Britons have a hope of establishing Arthur, advise John to have Arthur blinded, and being rendered thus unfit to reign, sent back to Brittany. John orders three servants to perform this *opus detestabile*; of whom two flee, the third coming to Falaise, where Arthur is in Hubert de Burgh's charge in triple chains. The soldiers riot, and Hubert, moved to pity by Arthur's tears and prayers for vengeance on this, the last man

¹Stubbs. Vol. II, p. 92.

²Ed. J. Stevenson. Rolls Series, Vol. 66. The MS. is in Ralph's own hand.

he shall see, sends the fellow away. He resolves to keep Arthur safe till John, who he believes has acted in sudden temper, repents; but he spreads a story that the outrage is committed and Arthur dead of suffering. At this the Bretons make such an outcry that Hubert reveals the truth, which John is not displeased to hear, and Arthur is sent to Rouen under the charge of Robert de Veypont. Philip invades Normandy when John refuses to give him up in 1204, making impossible demands because he doesn't really want peace. He then confesses ignorance as to whether Arthur is still alive; but having heard that he was drowned in the Seine is resolved on war to a finish.

Under 1207, after Langton's consecration by the Pope, John's expulsion of the Convent at Canterbury and later his savagery to all the clergy, exhibited especially against the possessions of the bishops who had published the Interdict, is described at length.

Finally in 1213 with Philip ready to invade England John submits to Pandulph and offers his kingdom to the see of Rome. Nicholas of Tusculum, the papal legate, partly because he is too favorable to John, fails to settle the quarrel with the barons, who, demanding their old rights and the observance of the laws, have entered London. From day to day, says Ralph, all the barons but a few "in exercitum Dei tranierunt." At last compelled to meet them and sign Magna Charta, John again eludes them from day to day, falsely accusing Langton at Rome. The Barons summon Lewis, at whose approach John marches hither and thither, ignominiously fleeing. At length through gluttony he contracts dysentery and so dies amid many portents.

Ralph of Coggeshall is primarily interested in the church. He approves of John in the early French wars as fighting for English rights against France. But after the issue of the Interdict he has nothing good to say of him, characterizing him as a cruel exactor and godforsaken man. The historian's moral indignation coloured his judgment, and he makes John a poltroon as well, failing to realize the extraordinary ability that almost saved Normandy against great odds and that so nearly overcame the united barons.¹

The meagre annals of the monastery of Margan in Glamorganshire² are interesting for their attitude toward Arthur and their unique account of his death, and for their story of the Breuses. The few entries concerning John are entirely hostile to him owing no doubt to his harrying and high-handed conquest of Wales. His assumption of the crown is pronounced a usurpation because Arthur was living and because John had been condemned at Nottingham after Richard's return from the Crusade. William de Breuse and the other flatterers who took part in the coronation all sinned and were heavily punished, especially William de Breuse, who most offended. At Corf John slew twenty-two of the two hundred knights captured at Mirabel. At Rouen, in 1204, about five days after Easter in the afternoon, *drunk and full of the devil, John killed Arthur with his own hand and threw his body with a stone into the Seine.* A fisherman finding and recognizing the body, buried it secretly for fear of the king. Philip

¹It is remarkable that none of the English historians seem to know of the very brilliant plan to relieve Gaillard that failed by such a narrow margin.

²Ed. Luard, Rolls Series, Vol. 36: The monastery was founded by the Earl of Gloucester in 1174.

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summoned John to trial, but he fled. In 1210 invading Ireland, John took prisoners William de Breuse junior and his wife and children and mother. William the elder fled to France and John killed his wife and son in prison by starvation, driving Walter de Lacy, his son-in-law, into exile.

The annals of Margan are interesting as illustrative of the hate of John, and the inventions to which it led; for they are not, I think, to be trusted. If de Breuse was instrumental in the coronation it does not appear elsewhere, and the story of the knights killed at Corf is almost certainly false, directly contrary to all other evidence. The rest of the Breuse story appears in many places, and became popular in the Elizabethan Robin Hood plays.

Four other brief Annals, those of Tewkesbury,¹ Burton,² and Dunstable,³ and of Melrose⁴ in Scotland give an interesting glimpse into the general consciousness of the struggle of John's reign; though it must be remembered that the monks were even more remote than the common people, unless in the special way of learning events. The most remarkable fact is that none of them says a word of Arthur's death, their only reflection of that strife being that John through carelessness lost Normandy; though, to offset this loss, his complete triumph over Wales and Ireland is noted. Two only, Burton and Melrose, mention Magna Charta, and only as an article of temporary peace. Naturally they are all fullest in their account of the Interdict and its attendant miseries, though not all accurate in their knowledge of the events which led up to it. Burton has a long report of the interview between John and Pandulph in which John offered to do anything except receive Stephen Langton.

One sentence in these Annals of Burton stands out in interest for a hint of the Robin Hood story. The annalist adds to his account of the siege of Nottingham⁵ that those who were defending it for John resisted even after Richard was come until *they knew he was there in person*. The Chronicle of Melrose tells of Peter of Pomfret's bold prophecies to John, of one in particular that the son of a good woman would reign after John, "which we think was said of Master Philip, son of Holy Mother Church." This Chronicle has also a rather lengthy account of the barons' war, opening in verse:

"Nam praesse capiti corpus concupivit
Regem suum regere populus quaesivit"⁶

Its interest in this subject is explained by the part which Alexander, king of Scotland, took in the war.

On the other side of the story are two French chroniclers, to whom John's struggle for Normandy is the important subject. To Rigord, who wrote a history of Philip⁷ to the year 1207, John is only a side issue, the

¹Ed. Luard, Rolls Series, Vol. 36.

²Ed. Stevenson, Bannatyne Club, Vol. 49.

³Taken from Hovenden.

⁴The whole of perhaps twenty lines seems to be in *vers libre*!

⁵Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton publiées pour la société de l'Histoire de France par H. François Delaborde, 1882, Vol. 2.

⁷Rigord, born about 1145-1150 was a doctor of medicine who in 1189 entered the Abbey of Saint-Dennis.

object of Philip's gracious courtesy in 1201 which he repays with ingratitude the next year. John's military prowess is belittled, his capture of Arthur being attributed to vastly superior forces, but no attempt is made to defame him, so that even if the author had heard stories of Arthur, he might not have mentioned them at this time. One story that he tells under 1187, in his first mention of John, sounds strangely of our subject. One of a group of dicers blasphemed the Virgin and broke off the arm of a statue of the Infant Christ, which bled. John, called Sine Terra, who happened to come by just then, picked up the bleeding arm and carried it away with great reverence and honour.

More important is the work of William the Breton,¹ a fiery partisan of Philip and Arthur against John. Of his two works—the *Chronicle* and the *Philippidos*—the *Chronicle*² concerns us here. It is original from 1207, up to which year it follows Rigord with a few additions and omissions, the chief differences being that William makes more of Arthur's inexperience and describes John's cowardly but unsuccessful attempt to relieve Chateau Gaillard by night. In 1213 Philip prepares to attack England in order to restore the exiled Bishops, to renew divine service, and to make John, as his name signified, really landless, *because he had killed his nephew Arthur*³ and hanged hostages, and committed other crimes, but is prevented by John's submission. John is described as himself living in luxury while he urges Otto to attack Philip. The result is the defeat at Bovines after which Philip, who then had such a force that he could easily have taken England in a few days, with his usual magnanimity, consents to make a five years' peace with John! Lewis, in spite of his father's strong disapproval and in spite of the Pope's command, went to England when the barons' war was renewed, John fleeing before him till God ended his evil.

The Editor claims for William the Breton that he never altered facts, only suppressed a few, yet the chronicler puts all John's defeats down to the score of cowardice and his successes to that of overwhelming odds; he makes Philip a lover of peace and the most disinterested of men, John a provoker of broils. It is to be noted that there is no mention of Arthur's death till 1213. In this work however, William was content with a statement of facts as he saw them. His great powers of vituperation and of dramatic incrimination were reserved for his poem, of which we shall speak later.

A different kind of source is the *Magna Vita S. Hugonis*,⁴ by the Black Monk Adam. It touches John only where his life comes into contact with that of the great Bishop of Lincoln, but gives some interesting material not found elsewhere, for the Bishop was with John on the journey from Chinon to England after Richard's death.⁵ The author, it

¹Born in Brittany between 1159 and 1169, William studied at Nantes and at the University of Paris, and was later attached to Philip's court as clerk or chaplain. He was with Philip in 1204 at the siege of Gaillard and later at Bovines and was the tutor of his son Charlot.

²Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton.

³Speaking of detention of Elinor of Brittany later in the same year, William says: "For he (John) hated all of his blood and had killed with his own hand his nephew Arthur who would have been king."

⁴Ed. Dimock, Rolls Series, Vol. 37.

⁵Hugh was a very popular saint and his life widespread.

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must be remembered in every thing he says of John, was for some years in the household of Hugh, to whom John lacked in reverence, and was moreover in exile during the Interdict.

At the time of Richard's death John, leaving Arthur, comes to the Norman treasury at Chinon, where he rejoiced to see Hugh. Hugh doubts even then John's vows to preserve the legitimate customs and just laws of his lands and peoples inviolate, and when John shows him a certain amulet, an heirloom, which he expects will keep his inheritance safe, bids him trust rather in Christ the living stone. At the church at Fontevrault he shows John the carvings on the porch, representing the Last Judgment, and exhorts him to be of the righteous. Turning to the other side of the porch, where were depicted the chosen, John said that the Bishop should rather have shown him that.¹

For a few days John put on great humility and generosity, but his conduct on Easter day opened people's eyes. For, after being rude and impatient for dinner during Hugh's long sermon, he would not stay the sacrament, nor did he do so at his coronation on Ascension day, and it was said that he never had performed this rite since he reached years of discretion. At his investiture with the Duchy of Normandy, when the Archbishop of Rouen was putting into his hand the lance bearing the vexilla, some silly youths behind him laughing, John turned to join the sport and so let fall the lance. This was taken by all as a bad omen, later fulfilled.

On the other side, is related Arthur's insolent and scornful reception of Hugh of Lincoln when the Bishop urges him to cherish peace and love toward his uncle.

During his last illness (1200) Hugh tells Adam, the author, that evils are coming upon the English church and that the French king will take vengeance on the false and shameless Eleanor's issue, because she left Lewis and joined Henry. "Therefore the Gallic Philip will wipe out the royal stock of the English as an ox plucks up grass by the roots. Three have been already rased by the French, two kings and a bishop, and the fourth will have short peace from them." We can see in this particular account something put in by the writer from a knowledge of later events, but the idea of a race doomed for the sins of their mother is persistent, appearing markedly in our next author, Gerald of Wales.

Gerald² is in some ways the most interesting of all these writers because of his close connection with John in the early years, and because in him, since his works spread over many years, we can study at first hand the change of opinion about John. Gerald, a descendant of the famous Lady Nesta, kin of the early conquerors of Ireland, a favorite of Henry II, was sent with John on the expedition for the conquest of Ireland. The impressions of this expedition are recorded in two works, the *Topographia Hibernica*, and the *Expugnatio Hiberniae*.

The first work for us to notice is the *Topographia* 1188 and 1189. It

¹At the recollection of this scene the author breaks into an apostrophe. "Would that John, who even in this day (1212-1213) when the fourteenth year is slipping by since these things were said and done, seems to have given to oblivion all that on that day he saw, heard, promised and said, would that he would remember now though late what he then said and did."

²Ed. Warner, Rolls Series, Vol. 21.

contains only one item of interest for us, but that of the greatest interest, the comparison of John and Geoffrey repeated in the *De Instructione*:

Dignas quoque duorum sequentium laudes Armorica Britannia et Hibernica regna proclamant. Ambo hi staturae modicae, pauloque mediocri plus pusillae; et formae pro quantitatis captu satis idoneae.

Horum igitur alter, virtutibus insignis, titulisque jam summus; et alter erit. Ille militaribus negotiis plene instructus, hic instruendus: ille in spica, hic messis in herba: ille in re magnus, hic in spe magnificandus. Ille, stirpe ab inclita non degener, nobilissimos fratres virtute pro viribus aequiparavit: huic ab utroque pariete virtus originaliter inserta, suo in tempore degenerare non poterit.

Ille vir eloquens et astutus——

Hic vero fluxae ferventisque juventae tam laqueis illectus, quam stimulis irretitus;

“Cereus in vitium flecti, monitoribus asper,”

tempori se conformans, et naturae motibus non repugnans. Ratione siquidem aetatis, molitiis hactenus magis addictus quam militiis, deliciis quam duritiis, Veneri quam virtuti; [juvenili quippe magis adhuc levitati, quam virili quo nondum attigit maturitati]. Illa plurimum exercitatus militia, qua militat omnis amans; per quam et bonae indolis adolescentes ad armatam plerumque militiam animari solent, et a Cupidinis castris ad Palladis arces et artes sublimari. Sicut ergo viridis juventae propria, sic et sequentium aetatum jura sequetur. Unde et quoniam

“Non lusisse pudet sed non incidere ludum,”

juvenilis excusabilis est levitas, cum laudabilis fuerit ipsa maturitas:

“Tunc prima est inculpabilis aetas,
Cum ludis ponunt tempora metas.”

Ille, arbor in radicem ramos convertens, radices altas facere nequivit. Ultimus hic fratrum, et utinam futurus virtute non ultimus, utrique parenti fere semper obtemperans, longaevus in terris [et felix] esse promeruit [Cujus etiam descriptioni vulgatum illud Merlini Ambrosii vaticinium, de illo qui Hibernae moenia subvertet dictum, utinam sic vere consonet sicut et verisimiliter consonare videtur:

“Principium,” inquit, “ejus vago affectui succumbet, et finis ad superos convolabit.”]¹

The second of Gerald's works, the *Expugnatio Hiberniae*, written before Henry's death in 1189, was the most popular in later times. There have come down to us two early fifteenth century translations or resumés of the work, and the editor of Holinshed's *Ireland*, noting that all who wrote of that early conquest borrowed from Gerald, Sylvester Giraldus Cambrensis, as he calls him, yet thinks his book so worthy that he cannot do better than give it entire. We must agree with him for, though Gerald's Latin is somewhat crabbed, in the fluent translation of John Hooker the

¹Distinctio III. Cap. LII. The passages in brackets are omitted from the *De Instructione*.

book rises clearly out of the realm of mere history and becomes literature.¹ The first edition is dedicated to Richard, the second, in 1209, "To his most reverend Lord and beloved in Christ, John, the noble and worthy king of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy, and of Aquitaine and Earl of Anjou." The Epistle Dedicatory is very remarkable as indicating that even at this date Gerald did not fully realize the portentous nature of the quarrel with Rome, and still hoped for the best. It is perhaps written in that spirit in which the ancient Greek called the night the well-favoured time, to propitiate it and dissuade it from doing its worst. After an exhortation to John not to lose Ireland, and a very strong hint to beware of household enemies "always working of wiles and waiting for an advantage," Gerald begs John to pay the Peter's Pence which his father had promised the Pope, as it is his failure to do this that had caused his ill-success.

The first book tells of the early war and Henry's own expedition. Book Second opening with a relation of the Pope's permission for the conquest on condition of the payment of Peter's Pence, leads up to Henry's determination to send John.² John, though he would have preferred to go with Heracleius to Jerusalem, sets out under the shadow of a prophecy by Merlin: "And of this fire (Henry) shall arise a sparkle, for fear of which all the inhabitants of the land shall tremble and be afraid; and yet he that is absent shall be more esteemed than he that is present, and better shall be the success of the first than that of the second." John's expedition failed first because Henry had refused to help the Holy Land, secondly, because "our new men and Normans" mocked and abused the faithful chieftans, and these told the leaders of the rebellion how ill they had been used, "and how that a young man was come thither, guarded with young men, in whom there was no stay, no sobriety, no steadfastness, no assuredness, whereby they and their country might be assured of any safety." John's enemies made a great league against him, while his soldiers gave themselves up to debauchery, waste and destruction. Gerald in all humility admits that they got only what they deserved for their pride, but it must be remembered that he is Welsh and resents the interference of Normans to take the land. He blames the failure of the expedition not so much on John's "young and tender years as unto the evil counsels and directions of such as were about him and had charge thereof."³

In the *De Rebus Gestis* Gerald tells that in 1192 John boasted to him that he had been absolved from his oath not to enter England, whither he had returned for the sake of English luxuries. Gerald, reproaching him for laziness and cowardice urged him to conquer Ireland, to which John replied pithily that he did not love Ireland as well as the Arch-deacon did, because he had not so many relatives there.

In the *Life of Geoffrey of York*, Gerald laments that even John, for whom Henry had all his trouble, deserted him in the end; this theme is, however,

¹I have used the translation of Hooker, which while it is not verbally accurate, not so much so as the medieval translators where they are full, gives admirably the sense, at the same time giving the style an English quality and making it poignantly human.

²Hooker by a mistake makes John at this time only twelve years old, and the medieval translators, twenty-two. He was, as Gerald says, eighteen.

³Gerald says: "Tot igitur excessus et tanti licet ubique plurimum plus tamen pravis consiliis quam puerilibus annis sunt imputandi."

more poignantly touched upon in the *De Instructione Principum*, which Gerald finished in 1217, then a man of seventy. When he writes this, he has lived through John's reign, has been gravely abused,¹ has seen the church and churchmen heavily oppressed but in the end triumphant. Perhaps also he is now less afraid to write. He condemns the whole Angevin race, not excepting Richard whom he had earlier praised, and especially John, most tyrannical of all tyrants. In a very pathetic passage, to accentuate John's wickedness and ingratitude, he tells of Henry's despair at finding John's name on the list of his enemies. "Is it true that John, my heart, whom more than all my children I loved, and for whose advancement I have endured all these evils, has left me?" Finding it true he turned his face to the wall, saying with deep groans, "Let all the rest go as it may. I care nothing more for myself, nor anything about the world."

In this work Gerald tells of a *monk's* vision that all Henry's sons are to be overthrown by the son of Philip, and even now the fourth is weakening. Many visions foretell the doom of Henry's race; and a prophecy at his coronation promising woe to the island soon after his death is fulfilled in John:

Quod quidem ad tempus Johannis qui longe atrocius caeteris tyrannis omnibus tam in sacerdotium quam regnum Anglicanum suis insanire diebus et debacchari, fas omne nefasque confundendo, plectibili temeritate praesumpsit, referri potest. Dictus enim Johannes (cujus utinam vita nominis interpretationi concordasset) quatinus hic vel in paucis anticipatio fiat, quoniam fratres egregios atque parentes in bonis aequiparare non potuit, puta, sicut annis inferior, sic animis amaris et activus praebris longe deterior existens, non solum ipsos in malis, verum etiam in vitiis enormibus vitiosos vincere cunctos et maxime tyrannos omnes, quos vel praesens aetas vel longaevae memoriae recolere potuit antiquitas, destandis pravae tyrannidis activus totis transcendere nisibus elaboravit.²

A prophecy that John would destroy the realm by a double net was fulfilled in the Interdict and the oppressions of the church. The barons of England were saved from destruction only by the French, the virtue of whose kings is compared to the villainy of the English sovereigns. The work ends with a prayer for light dawning on troublous times, for peace, and for the *union of England and France* as the means to this.

Such is the note on which closes the work of Gerald of Wales, who in 1188, not ignoring his faults, had such high hopes of John; in 1189 dedicated his *Expugnatio*, in glowing terms, to Richard and extenuated John's errors in the Irish expedition; who, finally, in 1209 could still speak of John as the "noble and worthy King of England." We have already suggested that Gerald spoke of John at that time as he wished him to be. He could not, in the years 1188 and 1189, have any idea that John was

¹After his return from Ireland Gerald had become interested in the Welsh Church, especially the see of St. Davids, for which he strove to secure independence from Canterbury. Himself elected to the see on the eve of Richard's death, he was at first promised help in securing his independence by John, but kept dangling for years and finally deserted and his election quashed. In spite of this, John tried to persuade him to renew his quarrel with Canterbury, so he says, after the election of Langton; but Gerald cared more for the whole church than for St. Davids, saw it oppressed and made a saint of Langton.

²Distinctio III. Cap. XXVIII.

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to become king, and he failed, like Hovenden, to realize in the early character the coat of mail under the silken shirt. Neither is fear to be left out of account. But we find the true key for his total change of attitude in his position as a churchman; Stephen Langton was, in his eyes, only second to Becket as a defender of the church, and he rejoiced that episcopal elections long subject to the king's will "in islands and tyrannies," had under Innocent III been freed. His own personal disappointment made him feel the struggle more keenly. Moreover, Gerald was a Welshman of the Welsh and it is no wonder that he became vindictive as he witnessed the cruelties with which John triumphed over his country. Perhaps, in the close of the *De Instructione* he might wish to greet the rising sun, as he thought him; more likely he sincerely welcomed in any form a triumph over the last of the house that had subdued Wales.

Roger of Wendover wrote his Chronicle¹ in the years 1231-1235 at St. Albans. A diligent worker, he was his own compiler from 1188 to 1201 and after that an original source, for though far enough away to view John's reign in perspective, he was still close enough to have real facts. He is rather opposed to the prelates as enemies of the convents. In the early war he sympathizes with John. Philip made demands for Arthur which John neither would nor ought to yield. Arthur, in prison at Falaise, answered John's overtures to friendship, *stulto usus consilio*, with wrath and threats and demands for his kingdom. Philip, by whose advice the marriage with Isabel of Angoulême was contracted, was responsible for the renewed war in which John's march to Mirabel and bold fight is described with admiration and joy. Roger's version of Arthur's death is this: Arthur was sent from Falaise to Rouen and closely guarded, but not long afterward he suddenly vanished. John had a second coronation. Then the idea that Arthur was dead spread so persistently that John was suspected by all of having killed him with his own hands, and many thereafter hated John with a black hatred.

The tenor of John's answer to the Pope in the quarrel with Rome is that Langton was unknown to him and known to the French, and that he would stand for the freedom of his crown till death. His resolution to submit in 1213 is determined by four reasons: fear for his soul; fear of the invasion of Philip; fear of the desertion of his nobles whom he had alienated by the oppression of their wives and daughters, by exactions, and by the exiling of their friends; fear of Peter of Pomfret's prophecy.

The Breuse story appears in the fullest version we have yet had. When in 1208, fearing the treachery of his nobles John sends for hostages, his messengers come among others to the home of William de Breuse. In his absence his wife Matilda replies to them: "I will not give my children to your king John because he shamefully slew Arthur his nephew whom he ought honourably to have guarded." In 1210 John takes prisoner Matilda and her son William and has them starved to death at Windsor.

When the barons after the meeting at St. Edmund's Bury demand their rights of John, he signs the Charter to gain time. He calls in spiritual aid, they summon Lewis who comes in spite of the Pope's refutation of his charges and prohibition. The Barons warned by the dying Melun of Lewis' treachery return to John, but too late. Thrown into fever by

¹Ed. Hewlett. Rolls Series, Vol. 84.

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grief at his losses in the Wash, John has increased his illness by gluttony and died at Newark. This epitaph is written for him:

Hoc in sarcophago sepelitur regis imago,
Qui moriens multum sedavit in urbe tumultum.
Hunc mala post mortem timor est ne fata sequantur
Qui legis haec, metuens dum cernis te moriturum
Discite quid rerum paret tibi meta dierum.

Roger writes without judgment against John, with a surprisingly dispassionate zeal for the true facts. He sees John as the head of an English struggle against France and realizes his intentness upon his French domains till he is finally hindered by the barons' revolt. But though he gives him full credit for his energy of purpose, he reprobates John's luxurious life and idleness during 1204, and illustrates his proud indifference by citing his reply to the reports of Philip's gains. "Let him go on, I will recover in a day all that he can win in a year." In the quarrel with the Pope the chronicler is inclined to excuse John as only a tool. The barons' revolt he thinks lamentable, but justified by John's actions. In his general view, Roger is an Englishman first of all, though he can be fair to the French because they failed to take England.

Matthew Paris,¹ who was also a monk of St. Albans a little later than Roger, embodied the latter's work in his own two books, the *Chronica Majora* and the *Historia Anglorum*, rewriting only after the year 1213. But though he takes so much from his predecessor, the temper of his work is entirely different. He is not, like the other, detached in his view, but is imbued with the most violent hatred of John. Richard is made a hero and pardoned by Matthew for extortion and other wrong acts, while John's levies are dwelt on with strongest disapproval. The claim of a tax from the barons who would not go with him to France, for example, is designated in the margin as "Vulpina fraus," a foxy trick.

Of Arthur's death, Matthew adds to Roger, in the *Chronica Majora*² that he disappeared though the method of his vanishing was unknown to all, "utinam non, ut fama refert, invida;" which is as much as to say that he can believe the worst.³

Matthew tells the story of the capture of the Breuses with more accurate detail than Roger, adding to the account of their death that it was sad enough to make even tyrants weep. He adds also a number of stories not in Roger; as, John's employment of brutal Faukes de Breauté and his marriage to him of Margaret of Rives—described in an epigram as "lex exlex;" and quotes John's words on the death of Geoffrey Fitz Peter: "When he gets to hell, let him greet Hubert the Archbishop whom doubtless he will find there. By God's feet now for the first time am I lord and

¹Matthew Paris was one of the most popular historians; his *Chronica Majora* was published by Parker in 1571 and again in 1640.

²Ed. Luard, Rolls Series, Vol. 57.

³One very interesting addition is the quotation in full of Innocent's letter in answer to John's refusal to accept Langton. It is a masterpiece of diplomatic skill and subtlety, revealing more clearly than any account that by custom and precedent John was right, and Innocent seeking to extend papal power in new ways. But Innocent III was the most astute and calm of politicians and John, by his savage impatient temper and cruel retaliations, threw his cause away.

king of England.” While denouncing the Pope’s greed and ambition he insists upon John’s unchristianity illustrated in the story of his exclamation at the death of a deer: “How happily he lived, yet never heard a mass!” and in his words after the defeat at Bovines: “Since I have been reconciled to God and have submitted myself and my realm alas! to the church of Rome, nothing comes out well, but all things contrary.”

John is accused of spitefully hating all the best men of his kingdom, such as Saher de Quincy and Robert Fitzwalter and Langton, and is so little sensible of England’s weal that he offers the realm to the Emir of Morocco who, refusing it, asks for and is given this character of John, by one of his messengers:

He is rather a tyrant than a king, an anarch than a governor, an oppressor of his own men, a flatterer of others, a lion to his subjects, a lamb to foreigners and rebels—who through his laziness has lost Normandy and other lands, and would lose or overthrow England; an extorter of money, an invader and destroyer of natural possessions; he has few children and none strong, not taking after their father. His wife hates him and is incestuous, he himself corrupts the wives and daughters of his nobles and even of his relatives. He is not firm in the Christian faith.

Picturing John as almost frenzied during the barons’ revolt, Matthew says that he died in great bitterness of mind, and hopes that his few good deeds will plead with him before Christ. To Roger’s epitaph he adds this other:

Anglia sicut adhuc sordet foltore Johannis.
Sordida foedatur foedante, Johanne gehenna,

and closes by saying that it is not safe to tell what he really thinks of John!

The *Historia Anglorum*¹ is an abridgement of the *Chronica*; but for some reason, perhaps because threats had justified the fear expressed in the earlier work, he softens all that he there said of John, omitting much, as the account of the embassy to Morocco. The most important change is in the account of Arthur’s death: He disappeared from Rouen. Some say that trying to escape secretly he was drowned in the Seine; others that for rancor of heart he pined away. The French indeed say—but they are our enemies and should not be believed—that John killed him or had him killed. But at Rouen afterward John became so feeble and peaceful and luxurious that even his friends affirmed that on account of some bloody crime his wonted grace had departed from him—and so the story of homicide crept more and more into belief.

John is made to die in repentance and forgiveness of his enemies, with his last breath urging Henry to love his own men, be with them, follow them.

Matthew Paris’s original hate of John springs from his sincere Christianity aroused by the persecution of the monasteries. But stronger than this is his hatred of papal authority and methods; and his hatred, as a monk, of John’s submission to Rome can only be surpassed by his bitterness of spirit, as an Englishman, at the giving away of England. “Illa

¹Ed. Madden, Rolls Series, Vol. 4.

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non formosa sed famosa charta!" he cries. Inspired by these feelings he makes John cruel, greedy, blasphemous, licentious, but does not deny him, when he will exert it, energy and ability in war.

The *Chronicle* of Walter of Coventry¹ which Leland discovered in 1538 is particularly interesting because it was very well known to Bale. The *Chronicle* proper is preceded by a brief resumé of the kings, in which John is noted as follows:

Slippery John ruled for seventeen and a half years. He killed Arthur his nephew, whence the verse:

Ex hoc transgresso Normannia proditur Anglis
Istius culpa fuit interdictio facta
Sexannis durans centumque diebus et una
Hinc ex hoc regno capit annua Rome tributa.

The second part,² however, is entirely favorable to John, and Arthur's disappearance is characterized as a just judgment of God. Under the year 1211 the chronicler says that in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, there was no one who did not obey the king of England's nod, which could be said of none of his predecessors. And he would have been happy but for his losses across the sea and the excommunication. At his death he is described as a prince great but not fortunate, munificent to foreigners, a despoiler of his own men, trusting more to foreigners, wherefore he was forsaken in the end by his own subjects and very sad.

The lesser monastic annals of this time are unimportant. They all record the Interdict and the story of the Breuses. The majority do not tell of Arthur's death, yet they sympathize with the barons and reprobate John's employment of mercenaries. The Bermondsey Annals,³ which are particularly scanty, assume importance because they seem to contain the first notice of a version of John's death afterward almost universally accepted, recording that John died at Newark, or as some say *poisoned by a black monk, at Winchester*. One exception to the usual colorless tone is a single entry under the year 1216, in the *Chronicle* of Dunmowe, an abbey under the patronage of the Fitzwalters:

A strife arose between John and the barons on account of Matilda, daughter of Robert Fitzwalter, whom John desired, but whose father would not consent to give her to him. War broke out; the barons went to London, the king destroyed Baynard's Castle. Fitzwalter and others fled, Matilda going to Dunmowe where the king's messenger came to her under the name of love and poisoned her. After her death Fitzwalter became finally reconciled to John and was thereafter faithful.⁴ As the *Dunmowe Chronicle* continued till 1501 and is all in a single MS. of that time, we cannot tell when the story was first set down.

The *Chronicle* of *Lanercost*,⁵ of the North of England, is for the reigns

¹Ed. Stubbs, Rolls Series, Vol. 58.

²None of Walter's *Chronicle*, which dates about 1293, is original, though it contains some material not otherwise known to us.

³Ed. Luard, Rolls Series, Vol. 36.

⁴Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, Vol. VI, Part I.

⁵Ed. Stevenson, Bannatyne Club, Vol. 65. It was appended to Hovenden.

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of John and Henry a confused compilation,¹ but has under 1213, when Philip is about to enter England the following unique entry: Philip had given Arthur and his sister into John's custody, who seeing the boy eighteen, handsome, upright, popular and with a better claim than himself, resolved to remove him. At dinner one day, accordingly, he tried to throw him into the fire! The boy escaped that time half burned, but later John had William de Veypont and Master Westmer take him in a boat and kill him.²

Whence comes this strange myth? Perhaps the simplest explanation is that the throwing of the boy into the fire is the reflection that reached that remote northern country of the attempt to blind him with hot irons. The chronicle shows, I think, and is important for this only, how quickly a character tended to become fixed as all good or all bad.

Another myth maker, Walter of Hemingburgh,³ is more important because his myths won great belief, and his *De Gestis Regum Angliae*,⁴ to judge from the number of manuscripts, seems to have been very popular. The John of his work is a proud and haughty villain who has Arthur killed even before his own first coronation and boasts of dishonoring his barons. The direct cause of their war with him was this:

Eustace de Vesci had a wife beautiful and chaste whom John desired but could not win. He seized a ring from Eustace, sent it to her as though from her husband who was dying, bidding her come to London. As she came, her husband met her by chance, they discovered the truth and sent a courtesan in her dress to the king. When John afterwards boasted Eustace told him the truth, and fleeing, drew the barons to a head.⁵

A little later John's death "by the just judgment of God" is thus described:

When John went to Swinstead he heard that the abbot had a beautiful sister, a prioress, whom he ordered brought to him. A monk learning the cause of the abbot's distress offered to kill John if the abbot would pray for him. He took John some poisoned pears. John bid him taste himself, but unable to wait for the effect after the monk had eaten two, the greedy monarch seized the third and died that same night.

Some elements of both of these stories were used in the drama.

The so-called Robert of Gloucester⁶ written in its final form soon after 1265 is interesting as the first English metrical chronicle, and illuminating for our purpose as giving the concept of John formed at this time by a serious and disinterested historian. Stow at one time possessed the manu-

¹The Chronicle of Melrose is frequently copied verbally by this chronicle, as in the accounts of the Interdict and barons' war. The prophecy of Peter of Pomfret is copied exactly except that for "Philip" in the solution is substituted "the Pope."

²In some confused entries under 1201-03 the Chronicle had accused John of himself drowning Arthur in the sea.

³He lived in the time of the Edwards. His chronicle for the early years is a compilation from many sources.

⁴Ed. H. C. Hamilton, London 1848.

⁵A continuator of William of Newburgh, writing 1270-98, had said under 1215 that John in the North laid waste all men's land, especially that of Eustace Fitzjohn because he had put in the king's bed a certain common woman in place of his wife, whose finger he broke, thinking her to be Eustace's wife.

⁶Ed. William A. Wright, Rolls Series, Vol. 86.

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script.¹ Robert makes Arthur the rightful heir whom even in Richard's time John had tried to supplant. So Arthur attacked John, was taken at Mirabel and killed. Because of this Philip attacked John, winning Normandy and Aquitaine. Then came the Interdict. John departed from church and drove others out:

& pitosliche hom sulue · wende out atte laste ·
& the doren after hom · wepinde loke vaste · ²

At Pandulph's command he resigned the crown,

& thus pleide the king Ion · to him and alle his ·
Verst to lese Normandie · & suththe to paye this ³

The barons, chiefly because of abuse of their wives, revolted, which was a piteous thing with fathers and sons opposed. John died at Newark.

zuf eni man ther to help · God it him vorȝive ·
Vor he adde er this lond · to much wretchede idrive · ⁴

Peter of Langtoft's French verse Chronicle,⁵ written in the reign of Edward I, is interesting because of an extreme popularity which led to its being almost immediately translated into English verse by Robert of Brunne. Briefly outlining the events of John's reign, Peter disclaims knowledge of whether or not John killed Arthur, but says it was certainly by Athur's death that he got the throne. He blames the barons' war on John's abuse of women, and makes the king die of poison at Swinstead.

Knighton,⁶ writing about 1363, is important only as the perpetuator of the myths of Walter of Hemingburgh, from whom he copies the story of Vesci's wife and of John's death at Swinstead.

Taking the chronicles as a whole, the judgment of John seems to fall into these main lines: He is judged as an English king against Philip, or on the other side as a usurper against whom Philip waged a just war; as the opponent of the Pope; and here the bitterness varies according to the closeness with which the writer is touched, as in the case of Gerald of Wales; as the oppressor of the lesser clergy; finally, markedly in the case of those who do not know him outside of England, there are suggestions of hatred of him as the deuteragonist of the glorified Richard story. The Interdict is prominent because the writers are universally churchmen. In all the contemporary writers there is a tendency to hope well of him at first, but a great and terrible change is noted after the time of Arthur's disappearance. Those who know only his early life, deceived by his manners, think him in all things weak. Later writers recognize his strength in dealing with his own island—though any admiration is overwhelmed by his passion, meanness and bestiality; but the earlier tradition is carried on by annalists removed from quick knowledge, who understand nothing of the French struggle, upon which John's whole intent

¹There are two versions of the chronicle after the reigns of Henry I; one very brief. The longer version is the one by Robert. This is also the one which Stow knew.

²ll. 10188-9.

³ll. 10444-5.

⁴ll. 10554-5.

⁵Ed. Wright, Rolls Series, Vol. 47.

⁶Ed. Lumly, Rolls Series, Vol. 92.

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centered, except that England lost territory;¹ nor of home affairs except that they were asked for money and that John died in defeat. The one fact of his career that seems to have penetrated everywhere is the story of the De Breuses. They were perhaps in the wrong² but John by his cruelty made them martyrs, and as such they were universally known. Magna Charta seems to have been rather widely regarded as a temporary peace instrument; and as the intricate politics came to be less understood, the more romantic element came to the fore in the story of the barons' war, leading to the elaboration of the stories of De Vesci and Fitzwalter. Robert of Gloucester's chronicle may be taken, I think, as a fair representative of the general historical view of John about fifty years after his death. Oblivious of the French struggle, but moved with the pity of Arthur's disappearance, it makes him weak and vicious. This conception of his character persisted undisputed till the healthy Elizabethan imagination, set on its way by Bale, went back to original sources; and this conception in spite of the dramatists' vision of him, has come through almost to the present.

¹It is remarkable that no English writer seems to have known of the attempt for the relief of Gaillard which, though it failed, was probably John's greatest military plan.

²John's published account of their defaulting was attested by men of the highest honour.

II. Contemporary Literature

The material to be considered under this head consists of a number of songs satiric or laudatory in celebration of contemporary events; and of three long pieces, the *Philippidos*, the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*; and the *Histoire des Ducs de Normandie*. For the collecting of the minor political poems I am much indebted to Mr. Livingston Corson's *Finding List*.¹ The first song that we have is a *Sirvente on John*² in Provençal written by the younger Bertrand de Born (?) to Savary de Mauleon, 1204-1205, urging him to leave John. The author announces his intention to be bitter because of John's slothfulness: "He lets Poitou and Touraine go—Richard would have defended Guienne and is lamented by it." With splendid vigor he urges Savary to depart, enforcing his exhortation with the example of William of Orange, to make John more ashamed. A digression in praise of the poet's lady gives added effect to the last stanza because of the sting with which it comes back to politics: "John loses his people because he succors them not near or far off. He loves better fishing and hunting, pointers, greyhounds, and hawks—and repose."

Far less effective is a *Song on the Siege of Thouars*,³ written apparently when Thouars was in danger during Philip's incursion into Poitou in 1206; calling on the Earls and the Old Man of Bouaig, Savary de Mauleon, not to desert.

The next song,⁴ 162 lines of Latin, is directed against the three bishops, Norwich, Bath and Winchester, who adhered to John during the quarrel with Langton. Praising the faithful bishops, it bids Kent lament for the delay of Stephen—its second Thomas—and turns to rebuke the evil three for their extortion:

Hi tres insatiabiles,
Sanguisugis persimiles,
"Affer," dicunt, "non sufficit."

The reverse of this picture is seen in a bitter but not very eloquent *Song on the Times*,⁵ an *Invectio contra avaritiam*, said to have been written during the Interdict. It is against the extraordinary greed and venality of Rome. The allegory of it is explained by marginal notes on the MS. (of the reign of Henry III) which Wright thinks may have been written by Bale—which say that the lion of the poem designates John and the asses, the bishops—and in the end, Jupiter represents John to the Pope's Pluto.

In the year 1213-14 the Abbot John of Saint Albans made a learned couplet⁶ in blame of the inexorable exactor Richard de Marisco and his

¹A Finding List of Political Poems referring to English Affairs the XIII and XIV Centuries. University of Pennsylvania Doctor's Thesis, 1916.

²Wright, Political Songs of England from the Reign of John to that of Edward II. Camden Society, Vol. VI, p. 3.

³Wright, Political Songs, p. 1.

⁴Wright, Political Songs, p. 6.

⁵Wright, Political Songs, p. 14.

⁶Rolls Series, Vol. 3, Part 1, p. 224.

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king. "Abimelech will not have rest while Saul is king, nor firm peace till Doech ceases to be."

The verses on the Marriage of Margaret of Rives we have spoken of in treating the *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris.

An anonymous kreuzlied¹ written perhaps in 1214 urges Philip and Otto and John to make peace and save the holy land:

To King Philip and Lord Oto
And to King John likewise
I advise that they make an agreement
Between them and follow the pardon,
And serve Holy Mary.²

The two Elegiac poems³ have been spoken of in connection with Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris.

A poem that is in many ways the most remarkable of all these is one of triumph on the Taking of Lincoln⁴ by the supporters of Henry III in 1217, that has a noble dignity and real fire that can creditably support its dactylic hexameter. The poem opens with a description of the closing years of John's reign. A fourfold rage burned England, the first rage (the barons' war) was consumed by its own pride; the second brought the French, the third the Scotch, the fourth the Welsh. God permitted the rage for a while that he might chasten. England was bowed, felt the anger of the divine judge and feared to serve the proud tyrant.

Non tulit ulterius regem regnare furem
Vindicis ira Dei; cecidit percussus ab illo
Cujus templa, domos, combusserat igne minaci.
Summus honos mors illa fuit, culmenque decoris
Attulit, in nullo quod erit superatus ab hoste
Et tot erant hostes; victus victore superno,
Invictusque suos hostes moriendo momordit.

The rage ceased, and widowed England mourned for John.

The last of these poems is a *Sirvente on Rome*,⁵ written 1226-1229 by Guillaume Figuières, a tavern poet who composed his own music and himself sang his verses. He is primarily an erotic poet, but this, his principal piece, is a diatribe against the clergy, a *Sirvente* "on the clever deceptions of Rome, head of the decadence," composed in Italy under the protection of the Ghibelines. The author makes all the accusations against Rome that even Bale could, giving among his examples the following:

Roma enganairitz,
Qu'etz de totz mals guitiz
E sims e razitz
Lo bon reys D'Anglaterra
Fon per vos trahitz.

¹Die Lieder Peires von Auvergne, kritisch herausgegeben—von Rudolph Zenker * * * Erlangen, 1900, p. 147.

²I am indebted for the translations of this and a following Provençal song to Dr. J. P. W. Crawford.

³*Chronica Majora*, Rolls Series, Vol. 57, Part 2, p. 669.

⁴Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 19.

⁵Raynouard, *Choix des Poesie*, Vol. IV, p. 309.

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Deceiving Rome,
Who art guide of all ills
And the seed and the root;
The good king of England
Was betrayed by you.

These poems represent most of the attitudes taken toward John in the *Chronicles*. There is none on *Magna Charta*, as Mr. Corson notes with surprise, but the famous document, as we have already seen, seemed then only a broken treaty of peace, and the struggle about it not at all settled; nor are there any on the more romantic theme of John's treachery to Richard. He appears as the oppressor of the church and as the oppressed of the church, a theme which was to find full flower only many years later in Bale, as the oppressor of his people, as a poltroon, and finally, as the English king for England, however bad. The songs vary in literary worth as widely as in subject matter, some being worthless rants, others having a distinct merit. The two last are the most important, and particularly, it seems to me, that on the taking of Lincoln. The other, though it has literary power, is not so important for our subject. This poem, while it fully realizes John's crimes and justifies the barons' revolt, yet sees in him the champion of England against French, Welsh and Scotch invaders, and, now that all fear of his tyranny is removed, rejoices that he fell a victim to none of his enemies. The exultant spirit of a united England, expressed with the intensity of true poetry, signalizes that universal return to her cause which marks John's closing days, therein foreshadowing the mood in which Shakespeare was to write his *King John*.

The three long pieces which are next to be our study, though they are among the most valuable historical sources for the reign of John, take their places primarily as literature rather than as history, because of the purpose and spirit of their authors, outwardly manifested in two of them in the verse form, the third being, though in prose, in the vernacular.

The *Philippidos*¹ of William the Breton is a long poem in Latin hexameters, written to sing the glory and praises of Philip of France. It covers the same ground as the author's prose work, but with such additions, omissions and exaggerations as the poet felt to be suited to a work of art and adapted to bring out in the light he wished the characters of Philip and of his enemy John². The outline follows the prose work except where indicated, but is a little simpler in the plan, which may be thus stated: If Philip is an angel, John must be a devil.

Having revealed his proper character at his first appearance (Book III, 742) where he is the wanton cause of his father's death, during Richard's captivity the wicked John persuaded the French to war on Richard, upon whose return he fled to Philip, who, though unwillingly, received him. In 1199 Richard died lamented for his piety and love of the church!

Succedit ei, quo peior in orbe
Non fuit, omnimoda vacuus pietate Johannes.³

¹Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton.

²It is to be remembered that the poem appeared during the lifetime of Philip—the beginning of Book III was completed before 1215—and is dedicated to his son Charlot. The account of Philip's death was added in 1225.

³Book V, 621-2.

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in spite of Arthur's right. Immediately after his coronation, terrified into making peace, he offered much gold and silver for his inheritance, and striking while the iron was hot, even arranged for Lewis to marry Blanche. But treachery was his familiar, and peace left one not worthy of her:

Hostes ex propriis miser, ignarusque futuri,
Divino sibi iudicio procurat amicus;
Colligit et virgas quibus olim vapulet ipse.¹

He stole the promised wife of Hugh le Brun, and Philip,² after urging him with infinite patience to make restitution, was compelled to war. Feeling the siege of Mirabel and its results to be the central incident of John's career, William exerted all his powers upon it. Arthur with a few men sets out for Poitou. Joined by the Lusignans, Hugh le Brun and the Poitevins, in doubt whether he is strong enough to risk the attack, the young prince consults his chiefs in a simple and ingenious address of sixty-three lines:

Novi me quantum patruus meus oderit, et vos
Quam sit crudelis sitiens quam sanguinis et quam
Seviat in cunctos quos casus subicit illi,
Et modo nil curat quid ei rex auferat, ut qui
Me solum querit, regna in mea sola protervit,
Me, quoniam regi faveo, semperque favebo;
Me, quia sceptrum peto mihi debita jure paterno
Me, quia germanam repeto, quam carcere clausam
Ipse tenet metuens amittere regna per ipsam."³

The Poitevins in an answering speech inspire courage into the noble boy, and the attack is made. John, however, realizes as strongly as Arthur the importance of the situation, and resolves therefore to conquer by a trick, for though so vastly superior in numbers he dares not approach by day. He in turn addressed his soldiers. Right is sure to triumph on the part of a son fighting to save his mother, so they need fear nothing. God will give them the victory:

Tutius esse tamen illos invadere nocte
Arbitror, oppressos somno, vinoque gravatos,
Dum sibi nil metuunt, dum, post mera, postque laborem,
Per diversa quies loca sparsim detinet illos.
Hac igitur bene nocte, precor, sit quisque paratus,
Ut sine conflictu jam vinctum vinciat hostem,
Hospitio dum quisque suo dormitat inermis.⁴

After John's speech, William de Roches asks a promise from him to kill no captives nor take any north of the Loire, but to settle their fate in council,⁵ and John promises, calling down dreadful imprecations upon himself if he fail. After they have attacked and defeated an enemy at every point,

¹Book VI, 97-99.

²Philip in fact, as we learn elsewhere, had urged John's marriage.

³Book VI, li. 325-331.

⁴Book, VI, 404-410.

⁵This pact with William de Roches was made a considerable time before this, but the author puts it in this place to secure dramatic effect and to emphasize John's wickedness.

as they had planned, at a disadvantage, he immediately breaks his oath, and William de Roches, the Angevins, and all to whom John was before dear, leave him. Shutting Arthur up in Falaise, he deliberates how he can kill him so secretly as to escape notice. When the offer of a reward has failed to tempt any of his servants to do the deed, he sends Arthur to Rouen, William de Breuse, his custodian, refusing longer to guard Arthur. "I know not," he said, "what fortune will bring him, but I leave him safe in life and limb." John steals off in a skiff in the middle of the night, of the fourth day, sails to Rouen, to a door of the castle that is open only twice a day, at low tide. At this intense moment, William breaks off into a forty-five line disquisition on the marvel of the tides—John, standing high in the ship, orders Arthur to be brought to him, and taking him aboard, goes off. Words do not fail the wretched boy:

"Patruë, clamabat, parvi miserere nepotis,
Patruë, parce tuo, bone patruë, parce nepoti;
Parce tuo generi, fraterne parvito proli,"¹

But his cries are vain. Relentlessly seizing him by the hair, John stabs him again and again, and going on about three miles, throws his body into the river; a deed worthy of a new Judas, a new Herod. Thus the Jews resolved to sacrifice Christ, fearing to lose their race and home, and by the crucifixion lost all; so may it befall thee, O John, for Arthur's death; thy father did not misname thee Lackland; now is thy fatal hour coming, nor is it far off, when hated by all for that death, thou shalt long be landless, and at last deprived of life. Many crimes hast thou been guilty of, that thou mightest be more worthy of eternal burning and no grace found for thee.

In Book VII Philip, resolving war on John to avenge Arthur's death, attacks Gaillard. Here again John is afraid to try anything in the daylight, so he plans a night attack for the relief of the fortress. Not daring to go himself even at night, he sends his chiefs, but the attempt fails.

In Book VIII (1208) John, finding himself unable to triumph over the French, even through the Albigenes, whom he aids, turns his fury against Christ and his servants. He despoils the churches and the clergy and his own subjects and tortures them. Those whom he cannot despoil he kills with the sword, or starves with slow torture.² He drives out the prelates so that he can more easily seize their goods. He *suspends the services*; the voice of the clergy is silent through all England, and there is no Sacrament nor any office of the church for seven years!

This certainly will seem the limit of what malice could say of John! To make the murder of Arthur horrid with circumstance, to declare John a coward, to paint his tyranny in lurid colours, might perhaps be justifiable in the court historian of Philip. But to make John himself the voluntary author of that suspension of church rites which the issue of the Interdict enforced, rage at which was responsible largely for the oppression of the clergy, is indeed to fail of giving the devil his due. But the flattering idealizer of Philip, if he wished to lavish his efforts in depicting the horrors of that time, did well to keep silence as to the Interdict; for

¹Book VI, ll. 556-58.

²ll. 897 ff. This is perhaps a reference—though put too early—to Matilda de Breuse.

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he knew well, what we are in danger of forgetting, that France itself had been subject to interdiction and his hero to excommunication.

In Book IX Philip makes every preparation to avenge the church's losses; but the power of fear proving greater than the Divine Love, John pretends contriteness, crying out that he will restore all to the church; he is unworthy to reign and will be Peter's soldier. The Pope accepts his submission with the crown and tribute:

Hoc regnum Anglorum decoravit honore Johannes,
Hoc generi predulce suo decus addidit.¹

Books X, XI and the early part of XII, treat of the further continental wars. And now, in the fourth year after Bovines, after so many sins, John was deprived of life and realm. Clergy and people deserted him who had been the death of his father, the betrayer of his brother, the murderer of his nephew.² And so John died, according to the prophecy of his name, utterly landless.³

We have already seen what was the purpose of this author. He takes only the worst elements of John's character and blackens those, creating, however, a portrait no more ridiculous in its blackness than is the virgin white one of Philip. Yet in the very bitterness of his vituperation of John's cowardice and sneakiness, we can read between the lines a confession of the realization of John's prowess. War according to the rules was a bold battering of castles, a large extension of the rules of individual combat, with graceful amenities like those between Richard and Saladin. John, fighting to win, used a more widely planned and subtler strategy. And William the Breton, dimly realizing a greater intellect in John, however obscured by temper and hastiness, hated him more for the brilliant victory at Mirabel, and the almost success at Chateau Gaillard, than for his worst crimes. The absurdly weak speech fashioned for him at Mirabel gives the measure of a real superiority felt. William knew, too, in how large a measure Philip was responsible for Arthur's fate. Finally, there is no true poetry in the epic, and mere rhetoric tends to extravagant praise and vituperation.

Far finer than the poem of William the Breton is the Norman-French *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*.⁴ This Chanson de Geste was composed by a certain Johan at the request of the oldest son of William the Marshal, from material supplied by the hero's squire John D'Erlee. This Johan was not, however, as the editor thinks, the squire, but a professional trouvère.⁵ It is a series of episodes told in chronological order, and lacking artistic transitions, but the episodes themselves are told with directness and vigour. The trouvère is of course interested in tournaments, descriptions of which form some of the finest passages, but besides this decorative interest he has a keen sense of truly dramatic incidents and tells them in such a

¹Book IX, ll. 342-3.

²William says here that the people wished to chose Lewis for king but his father, unwilling to offend the Supreme Pontiff, would not permit it.

³Book XII, 294 ff.

⁴Ed. Paul Meyer, Publications de la Societe de l'Histoire de France, 1891, Vol. 2.

⁵William died in 1219 and the poem was probably finished in 1226. John D'Erlee, whose memoirs furnished its material, was in the Marshal's confidence and with him almost continually.

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way as to create consistent characters. The poem has not the unity of plot of the *Philippidos*, because William the Marshal is the perfect feudal knight, and the interest shifts as his fealty becomes due in turn to Henry, Richard and John; but his character gives a certain oneness to the whole. The author, a Norman, of course sympathizes with the English kings, his hero's masters, against the French. He does not gloss over John's crimes, but he sees the right in his position too. The character of the hero, though perfect is not irksome; he is strong, obedient, but firm in his just claims; and the author is saved by the consciousness of truth from the artistic degradation of fulsome flattery, for the Marshal really was, to judge by other testimony, a good man.¹

Philip is the arch-contriver of English woe. It is he who, after the young king's death, tempts Richard to war on his father, with whom, as the Marshal was then fighting for him, the poem sides absolutely. The story of his death is finer than in Gerald of Wales, partly because it is written in Henry's own language. John's name is given first on the list. Hearing that the being whom most he loved had betrayed him, Henry said not a word but "*Asez en avez dit*," and so turned to the wall. England has not had so good a master since his death, says the trouvère.

In the next years, the interest centres in England, the Marshal being there. Though the chancellor is blamed as proud and ambitious, the author realizes to the full John's treachery, but passes lightly over it, because anything having to do with John is then only incidental. On Richard's return, John flees to Philip who now, breaking his word, turns a cold shoulder upon him. The reconciliation of the brothers is fully and dramatically recited. Richard staying at the house of John D'Alencon, guesses from his host's manner that he has seen John; he sends for him, bidding him not fear, being his brother:

"Johan, n'i aiez garde,
Enfes estes; en mal garde,
Remainsistes, mal le pensèrent
Cil qui mal conseil vos donèrent!
Levez de ci, alez mangier."²

A passage a little further on³ is very important as an illustration of the feeling towards Rome. Philip wished to send to Rome:

He called a clerk and gave him relics, without which one can't succeed at Rome, for one must always join palms there. The relics of Saint Rufin and Saint Albin (gold and silver) are very valuable there, they are good martyrs of Rome; without them, all that law or lawyer can say is worthless. He who has not such relics has a hard time entering the door.

In 1199 Richard, the best prince in the world, died. Pregnant with tragedy and big events is the ensuing scene between the Marshal and the Archbishop, a scene to which our author does full justice. Hearing the news in the night, William dressed hastily and went to the Archbishop, who cried out upon seeing him, "Ah, the king is dead, what hope have we

¹His fidelity to John, through all the troubles, though later literature confounding him with his son, joined him to the rebel barons, is universally attested.

²ll. 10409 ff.

³ll. 11358-11372.

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now—there is no one to defend England against the French.” William pointed out that they must immediately choose his successor. The Archbishop suggested Arthur. “Ah sire,” answered the Marshal, “that would be bad. He has evil counsellors, is haughty and proud. He will talk of our enemies, for he loves not the English (cels de la terre).”

Mes veëz le conte Johan:
Ma conscience & mon saveir
Le me mostre al plus proceien eir
Qui seit de la terre son père
& autresi de la son frère.”
Li arsevesque respondi.
“Mar, volez le vos si?
Oïl, sire, quer c’est raison,
Quer plus près est sanz achaisoun
Le filz de la terre son père
Que li niés; dreiz est qu’il i père
—Mar. e il ert isi;
Mès itant vos a comt & di
Qu’ onques de riens que vos feïstes
Autretant ne vos repentistes.”
Et li Mar. dist: “Merci;
Toz dis lo ge qu’il seit eïssi’

The poet has put poignantly and clearly the hard choice which England had to make yet which she did make unequivocally in John’s favor.

Of the marriage with Isabel of Angoulême, cause of all the woe, our author says that the Count of March and his counsellors knew well that some at the French court were concerned in the theft. For the renewed war after the marriage of Blanche and Lewis, he gives the entire blame to Philip and his impossible demands; also for the taking of Arthur. So great was John’s victory on that day that all the war would have been finished if John had not been ill-fated and his pride had not driven him down. He broke his word to William de Roches, his pride blinded him, and so he lost many followers. Philip urged on the strife thus created. At this time, the poet blames John’s strategy, but tells an interesting story of his ruse to get away even from his own men, that shows by what dreadful fear of treachery he was hampered.

In narrating the story of William the Marshal, the writer sheds much light on the whole intricate situation at this time. The English barons possessed also large lands on the continent, which John still claimed, but of which Philip was actual master and for which he was demanding homage. The barons put it off for a year, and within that time some of them got permission from John, who didn’t wish to see the lands go entirely out of his influence, to do fealty to Philip. A peace had been made, but its conclusion was interfered with by the Archbishop of Canterbury; with renewed war in prospect, the Marshal was accused by an enemy of having sworn to fight for Philip. He denied this, but would not either fight against Philip, now his liege for the French lands. John repudiating his permission plotted revenge against William. Accomplishing nothing,

¹ll. 11852-11908.

he pretended forgiveness, but took William's son as hostage. The Marshal then asked permission to visit his lands in Ireland. The ensuing story brings home to us with terrible vividness John's personal character. John calls back the Marshal who has hardly got to Ireland and will not let him go again though Meiler Fitzhenry is wasting his lands. John D'Erlee and Stephen D'Evereux defend them with greatest success, but John and William the Marshal in England, because of adverse winds, know nothing of what is happening. John, who will scarcely speak to William, at last asks whether he has had any good news from Ireland. "I know nothing." John, smilingly, tells him that his wife is taken and all his men defeated. Later the Marshal hears the real news but pretends that he is still ignorant; and John, telling him the truth this time, shows him favor thereafter; even forgiving him for harboring William de Breuse.¹

The quarrel with Rome is passed over almost in a word, because the hero had no part in it. Of the barons' war, too, our author has little to say, being afraid to tell all. Early in the poem² he had praised Fitzwalter, and says now that those who first allied themselves against John had cause, the rest only following their example. But not so William who even at the end, when John was poor and deserted, never left him; and John on his deathbed repenting of his distrust and abuse recognized this stirring character by entrusting his son to the Marshal's care.

In spite of the many important phases of John's career barely touched on, the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* gives the best comprehensive impression of the king's character, and for all its blame conveys the strongest sense of his power, however marred by passion and aimless malevolence. In the stirring conversation between the Marshal and the Archbishop, the obscure trouvère Johan, with better insight than he perhaps knew, gives the very essence of the situation of John and Arthur, a situation the truth of which the dying Richard and his barons grasped when they choose John at whatever risk as an English king to combat Philip. Philip's character, too, is subtly realized. It may perhaps seem that the author is unjust to him in not mentioning the excuse for his actions that lay in Arthur's murder, but in this he prefigures what later history has established. Arthur was only the pawn, taken up or dropped by Philip as policy dictated, recklessly risked at Mirabel, the most vulnerable spot in his uncle's armor.

One more long work remains which might perhaps have been treated with the histories, but which takes such manifest delight in anecdote and picturesque detail, and seems so informal and warm in its intent, that it demands a place in literature—the anonymous *Histoire des Ducs de Normandie et des Rois D'Angleterre*.³ Moreover it is, though in prose, in the vernacular. Internal evidence points very strongly to the author's having been a Fleming; less certainly, but still with a high degree of probability, to his having been in John's mercenary Flemish army during

¹The Marshal in 1210 harbored the Breuses on their way to William de Lacy. Though the Marshal owes protection to them and is fully excused on that account, the poet seems to feel that they were at this time in the wrong and fleeing from just debts.

²ll. 4615-6.

³Ed. Francisque Michel. Publications de la Société de l'Histoire de France, 1840, Vol. I.

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the barons' rebellion.¹ He is against the barons and the French; and Robert Fitzwalter is his pet villain, but he is not for John. Towards him he has the true mercenary's point of view, praising his military glory, quite ready to damn him for the rest.

Knowing of the will of Richard, that most valiant of men, and of the barons' oath, this historian hurries in a single paragraph over John's succession, peace with Philip, and disastrous marriage to Isabel of Angoulême. Then comes the siege of Mirabel, at which Arthur, in the course of a conversation with his grandmother, offers to let her go with her goods where she will, for he does not wish in his heart to hurt his grandmother. She replies that he might find other castles to besiege than that in which she is! William de Roches is made the planner of the strategy and the leader of the surprise by which Arthur is taken. John goes to Rouen with his prisoners, and there puts Arthur in prison in a tower, *à il moru*. William leaves John then and joins Philip. Besides the grounds for this defection, the Norman barons mock and scorn the English because of Robert Fitzwalter's and Saher de Quinci's too early surrender of Vaudreil; and the English barons on the other hand are filled with disgust to see their French lands going.

The historian tells of John's licentious character, and shaming of the nobles and of their hatred of him, but also of his open house and generosity in giving robes.² Apropos of this, he tells a story of John and Archbishop Hubert Walter, too good a manifestation of John's personality to be here omitted. Jealous of Hubert's lavishness, John unwillingly accepts an invitation to spend Christmas at Canterbury. At the end of his visit he asked whether the Archbishop knew why he had stayed so long. "Why, unless to do me honor?" "By God's teeth," said the king, "not so. But you are so generous and valiant that I couldn't touch you. You wanted to attract all the best men to you. Now, thank God, you won't have more than enough to eat." Hubert demanded to know where John would be at Easter. "What business of yours?" asked the king. "By Saint Julian," the primate answered, "you cannot conceal it from me, but I will find out and go there, and I will keep bigger court and more open house, and give more gifts and make more knights than you: and do the same at Pentecost, se jou vif adont; et encore aura Hubiers Gautiers à mangier!"³

Another glimpse of the personal side of John is given in a scrap of conversation with the queen. At the news of a defeat he turns to her, "Well Madame, all this have I lost for you." To which she immediately replies, "Sire, I also have lost the best knight in the world for you."⁴

After new defeats in France John turned to reducing the followers of his own court. He made himself so feared in his land that all men bore witness that since the time of Arthur there had been no English king who was so feared in England, Wales, Scotland or Ireland, as he

¹Down to Richard Coeur-de-Lion the author copies William of Jumièges; from then on is original.

²The character given him by some of the English chroniclers, "generous to foreigners" will be remembered here.

³Michel, p. 105-6. Matthew Paris speaks also of John's jealousy of Hubert Walter's wealth; and elsewhere of his having spent a Christmas with the Archbishop.

⁴Michel, p. 104.

was.¹ "The wild beasts had such peace," the narrator goes on, "that they went about as quietly as sheep." A curious description of John's forest laws!

After Hubert Walter's death, John asked to have a voice in the election of the new Archbishop because of the primate's position in the council. The monks played the king very false in respect to this matter.

This writer tells the story of the De Breuses at some length, describes the valorous nature of Matilda de Breuse, daughter of Bernard de Saint Valery, her war on the Welsh, her present to the queen at one time of three hundred cows and one bull, all white except for their red ears, her boast that she had twelve thousand milch cows and enough cheeses to defend one hundred Englishmen in her castle for a month. Hearing of John's coming she and her husband flee, she with her son to Ireland, thence to Man and Galway, where they are taken and afterward imprisoned by John in Corf.² In a dungeon there they are given only a basket of oats and a raw ham. "On the eleventh day the mother was found dead between her son's legs, setting upright, except that she leaned a little against her son, like a dead woman. The boy, who was also dead, sat upright except that he leaned against the wall like a dead man, and the mother in despair had eaten all his cheeks."³

The account of Fitzwalter appears in this work as nowhere else. His son-in-law Geoffrey de Mandeville, husband of his daughter Matilda, having killed one of John's men, flees to him for protection. John would hang him, but Fitzwalter begs for a trial. To this however he accompanies his son-in-law with men-at-arms. John puts off the trial; the same thing happens again. The king, indignant, orders Baynard's castle destroyed; Fitzwalter flees. Joining the king of France, whom he finds preparing to invade England in obedience to a dream, he gives the following reason for his exile: "John wished by force to lie with my daughter, the wife of Geoffrey de Mandeville. Because I would not suffer it, he has destroyed me and driven me from my land." In the meanwhile, John, scared by Peter of Pomfret, is composing his quarrel with Rome. So Robert goes to Pandulph and tells him that he had fled because John was excommunicated. Pandulph agrees to make his peace and get him back his lands.⁴

"Who so wishes to hear the occasion of the war on account of which King John died disinherited of most of England can indeed hear it in this writing." At a conference at Staines, this writer says, John made a peace (Magna Carta) without consulting his Flemings! They were very angry to hear of this cowardly peace, but nevertheless went with him to Malborough, where he was guilty of the worst deed of his career. He had a large store of treasure removed from the tower to his chamber and *gave the Flemings none*. After that villainy they left him.

In spite of his injustices to the Flemings, John is judged entirely in the right against the barons who want him to keep his promises to them, but won't keep theirs to their inferiors; and insult John personally, refusing

¹Michel, p. 109.

²(It should be Windsor.)

³Michel, pp. 111-12-14-15.

⁴Michel, p. 115 ff.

to come to him when he is too ill to go to them. The King finally dies from the effect upon his fever of grief and chagrin at defeat. There remains for us to notice only that our author several times¹ speaks of the Viscount of Melun as in Lewis's army, and serving him, *after* John's death.

The point of view of the Flemish writer is not, we see, purely disinterested, nor does he have an absolutely accurate knowledge; he is, however, interesting and well informed (if due allowance is made) on the events of the rebellion, and because of his lack of consciousness and his gossip interest touches John's personality very suggestively. His work has a peculiar importance from the fact that though it now exists in only three French MSS., it was, as I hope to show, not improbably the "anonymous history published at Lions" of Holinshed's England.²

Of these three works, the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* easily takes first rank.³ It has, if I mistake not, considerable absolute value. The characters are conceived with the artist's large impartiality and are animated by motives derived from no predetermination to find them good or bad, but from a sincere and poetic reading of life. They are revealed through action that copies life; they take more and more distinct outline through a series of incidents, being everywhere consistent. Besides these fundamental elements of greatness, a roughness of performance is easily forgivable. The *Philippidos*, in contrast to this, has a certain ease of manner, but is conceived in an absolutely partisan spirit that makes steadily against literary truth. The only depth of feeling responsible for its creation is a strong desire to flatter the hero. The John of this poem is an example of the—unfortunately—popularly accepted figure; though the other misconceptions were, I believe, more sincere. The *Histoire des Ducs de Normandie* is a less serious work than either of these. Its gossip character would be a reason for its popularity; a soldier has come back equipped with knowledge to write a history, and with a store of good stories. He has no real ill-nature and his artless and faithful reporting comprehends much informing material. His style is a pleasant one. The three so different characters of King John all painted by men of his own time illustrate the complexity of his character and life and point the way, if they are understood, toward the clearing up of the epic figure throughout literature.

¹pp. 185-188-198.

²Edition London, 1807, Vol. 2, p. 301.

³For the popularity of this poem in England we can only note that the sole MS. in which it now exists is English, and that an old catalogue of the library of St. Augustine at Canterbury mentions a "*Liber Guill. le March. in Gallico.*"

III. Later Literature—The Historical Plays

The next appearance of John is in the Romance of Richard the Lion-Hearted, written at the end of the 13th century, "from the French."¹ The poem opens with Henry II's search for a wife and his marriage to Cassodorien, daughter of the king of Antioch. In fifteen years they have three children, Richard, John and a daughter Topyas. During this time the queen has never waited for the sacrament in church and the barons, with Henry's consent, resolve at last to compel her. She seizes her daughter in one hand and John in the other, and flies through the roof. But,

"Johan fell frome her in that stounde
And brak his thygh on the grounde."

She and her daughter disappear forever.

The Romance tells with many changes and embellishments the story of Richard's Crusade, towards the end of which he is called home by news of the treachery of John,

"That was the fendes fflesh and bon,"

Richard cannot believe that John would dare rebel while he was living and hearty, but renewed messages that John intends to be crowned and that Philip is in Normandy convince him. These are the only notices of Prince John in the poem.

The legend of the Demon Countess is an old romantic one as M. Gaston Paris has pointed out² appearing in the story of Melusine, where the heroine, the foundress of the house of Lusignan, flies off in the shape of a dragon. But the direct source for it here is in Gerald of Wales's *De Instructione Principum*:

One of the counts of Anjou had a wife from no one knew where, who came seldom to church and was irreverent and never stayed the sacrament. When one day they attempted to force her to stay, dropping the cloak by which she was held, she whirled out through the window, with two of her children—leaving two—and never was seen more.

King Richard often referred to this, saying it was not wonderful, if they were of such a race, that the sons never ceased to attack the parents and the brothers to turn against each other; for they had all come from the devil and to the devil, he said, would all go.³

This does not add much to John's character in literature, but it is very significant as an indication that he was becoming a figure in folk story⁴ to whom all kinds of evil legends might become attached. The same interest belongs to the *Ballad of King John & the Bishop; or Abbot*.⁵

¹Ed. Karl Brunner Weiner Beitrage zur Englischen Philologie. Wein und Leipzig, 1913. There is no complete MS. till the fifteenth century, though several fragmentary MSS. The poem was printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1509 and again in 1528.

²Romania XXVI, 357-387.

³Distinctio III, Caput 27.

⁴Gough, in the Gentleman's Magazine, March, 1793, speaks of stones named for John, as for Robin Hood or King Arthur.

⁵Child, Ballads, Vol. I, p. 403.

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King John, jealous of the bishop of Canterbury's housekeeping and good cheer threatens to kill him and take his living unless he can answer three questions. The bishop's shepherd half-brother goes in his place and answers successfully. The motive of this ballad appears in many forms, in Scotland and on the continent; it is interesting to find John established as the chief figure of it in England plotting against a churchman. He is characterized in rough ballad fashion as a "notable prince."

"He did much wrong and mainteined little right."

These two poems are our only guide to literary tradition for a period of three hundred years though doubtless the character was familiar in unrecorded literature.

Bale's *Kynge Johan*,¹ represents an independent estimate of John's character. Bale had studied many of the original historians,² whom he condemned for having more Romish blasphemy than godliness, as well as the later writers, such as John Major, Hector Boece and Polydore Vergil.

There had been numerous controversial moralities on both sides of the religious question before this, but Bale was original in introducing the concrete figure of John for the Protestant martyr. Further historical figures are Langton, who is Sedition; the Pope, Usurped Power; and Symon of Swinsett, Dissimulation. The plot is a sketch of John's resolution to reform the church at the instigation of the window England, whose husband, God, is kept out by clergy; his frustration and death through the machinations of Rome; the weakness of Nobility, and the ignorance of Commonalty; England's subjection for three hundred years and final freedom. John's quarrel with the Pope and final submission is accurately outlined according to the historians, but the motivation is Bale's own. John wishes to give England a true and disinterested religion, dependent directly upon the Gospels; the Pope wishes to achieve wealth and civil dominion. All the rites and dogmas of the Catholic church are explained as means towards that end, and their efficacy shown in the subjection of Nobility through fear of the after life, and of Commonalty through blindness. Sedition, who is the Pope's instrument, boasts that through his master's aid he can subdue both King and Kaiser. England, who is often Bale's direct mouthpiece, answers:

"Truly of the devil they are that do anything
To the subduing of any Christian king;
For be he good or bad, his is of God's appointing
The good for the good, the bad is for ill doing;"

and right finally triumphs when this principle is established in the person of Henry VIII.

John's character alone stands out in sturdy lines. His language, virile

¹Ed. Collier, Camden Society, Vol. II—1838—the date of this play is uncertain, some commentators putting it as early as 1538, others not till near 1552. Later references are interpolated.

²Some of the MSS. have notes in his hand.

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and stern, but not cruel, is vivid amid the many abstractions. In his loneliest state he is dignified:

“Nobility
Is vanished away; as it were a winter mist.
All they are from me: I am now left alone,
And God wot! know not to whom to make my moan.”

To his own people he is mild and merciful, while the clergy are wolves in sheep's clothing; toward the emissaries of the Pope he is vigorous, answering defiance with defiance:

“Ye could no more and ye came from the devil of hell
Than ye go about here to work by your wicked counsel.
Is this the charity of that ye call the Church?
God grant Christian men not after your ways to work,”

he cries in answer to the excommunication:

“It becomes not thee God's secret works to deem
Get thee hence, or else we shall teach thee to blaspheme.”

That the church may have full blame, Nobility is made timid and guileless. At first faithful to John, he knows no better religion than the dogmas of Rome and so is led by Clergy and Sedition. Civil Order is delightfully vulgar and unimaginative; rather taken aback by the Interdict, but appeased by a promise of absolution.

There are four apologies to be made during the course of the play. First, John's universally bad character has to be accounted for. This is very easily done by the explanation put in Nobility's mouth, that as the church chroniclers are the historians, John will fair badly in record—“King John is like to rue it sore For vexing of the clergy.” Next, Bale seemed to feel the odium attached to John because of the hanging of Peter of Pomfret. Some of the lesser chroniclers quote as Peter's prophecy that John shall reign *only fourteen years*. Using this in combination with the other, Bale makes the Prophet change to Ascension Day when the prophecy of fourteen years has failed; and for this with other wrongs, says the play, he deserved hanging. Third, the loss of the French lands; but this is declared of slight weight in comparison with his victories in Wales and Scotland. Finally there is the surrender of the crown and kingdom to Rome. The subjection is made in answer to Rome's command.¹ Seeing all the enemies assembled against England and thinking of the horrors of war,

“Defiling of maids, and shedding of Christian blood!”

John resolves to yield, in spite of England's prayers:

“England, England, show now thyself a mother,
Thy people will else be slain without number.
As God shall judge me, I do not this of cowardness,
But of compassion in this extreme heaviness.”

It has been noted as remarkable that none of the historical plays on John mentions Magna Charta. The reason is very obvious in Bale's case.

¹It was really voluntary on John's part, but several historians have mistakenly made the subjection an article of the Pope's demands, and Bale used those that fit his purpose.

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The Charter was signed by John after the submission, when he was asking Rome's aid against the barons, and he appealed to the Pope to annul the Charter. This great document, according to Wyclife's doctrines, gave unjust rights to the church and on that score John's very unwilling signature might have been shown, but these privileges were inserted at the instigation of Langton when he was working against Rome's wishes. The barons in the play are made rebellious only at the church's command, so that their later war had to be passed over in silence.¹ The fact that many of the chroniclers had touched upon the Charter so lightly, or even not mentioned it, made the omission easier.

In spite of John's submission, Sedition is still busy, first bringing over Lewis of France, and finally encouraging Dissimulation to poison John. The latter in the person of Simon, a monk of Swinsett, brews a poisoned drink for John, content to be taster and die because he knows that the monks will pray for him. This story, shorn of all that is derogatory to John, is elaborated from the account of his death, given in Walter of Hemingburgh and Knighton.

How far was Bale justified by facts in this revolution of John's character? The process by which he reaches this interpretation is the reverse of that which usually affects our subject. As we have seen, he is usually made thoroughly bad, because he is the contrasting figure in the story of some one good. In this instance, Bale's first interest is the church of Rome and the Pope. The Pope being Antichrist, John must become, as Christ's representative, nearly perfect. Historically so far as precedent could establish right, John should have had the nomination of the Archbishop. Innocent was extending his powers and demanding prerogatives that no Pope before him had had. That John could have been blamed unjustly by some of his historians in that quarrel does not answer the charges of ruthless cruelty and licentious living. But it explains how his character might be whitewashed to such an extent that a story told to his disparagement in the version of his death would be altered to accuse his enemies by the author in whose judgment Henry VIII,

"A strong David, at the voice of Verity,
Great Golie the Pope (he) struck down with his sling;
Restoring again to a Christian liberty
His land and people, like a most victorious king."²

Between Bale's *Kynge Johan* and the writing of the next play on John, the ampler and more original outlook of the historians on whom he based his morality had become generally accessible in the work of Holinshed and Stow. Stow takes a romantic view of history, and is the source of the authors of the romantic plays. Holinshed is the chief source of the historical plays. Of his *Chronicle History of England, Scotland and Ireland*, published in 1578, the history of England is his own work. His narrative

¹Bale even makes John reject Gualo's aid, Collier, pp. 79-80.

²Bale draws much of his denunciation of the clergy, though not its virulence, from the works of Wyclife. For example, compare John's "The sentence of curse that scripture doth not direct—Shall be of no effect" in this play, with Wyclife's forbidding of foolish judgment—"and priests judging of men to heaven or hell—for they know not—is foolish judgment." *Of Dominion*. For Wyclife's influence on English Protestantism in general see Trevelyan's *England in the Age of Wyclife*.

of the events of John's life is strongly influenced by Bale's version; though he does not deny grave faults to the king. He thinks the charge of rebellion against Henry II was invented by Richard and Philip and blames Ely for the dissension during Richard's absence, though admitting that John joined Philip. He tells of Richard's will and maintains the justice of John's right which Eleanor, he says, especially fostered because of her jealousy of Constance. For the Arthur story, he tells of John's interview and the report of his orders to Hubert to blind Arthur, as given in Coggeshall. One motive of Hubert's mercy is his belief that John had spoken in a temper and would be glad to have his orders disobeyed. "Next year Arthur was taken to Rouen and never seen alive. Some say that attempting to escape he was drowned in the Seine, others that he died of grief, others that he was killed by John's orders." The cause of the barons' war, as of the clergy's hatred of John was his taxes, which he was unwise in levying. Some say the cause of the strife was the exile of Chester, some cruelty and avarice. "But these seem to be conjectures of such writers as were evil affected towards the king's cause." Holinshed agrees with Bale in ascribing the quarrel with the Pope to Innocent's desire of wordly power; "That beast whose horns were pricking at every Christian prince that he might set himself on the seat of supremacy above all principalities;" in making the Pope demand the crown; and in justifying the death of Peter of Pomfret. He gives the several versions of John's death, favoring none. The lesson drawn from his reign is the danger of civil strife; and the final estimate of his character is as follows:

"He was comely of stature, but of look and countenance displeasing and angry, somewhat cruel of nature, as by the writers of his time he is noted, and not so hardy as doubtful in time of peril and danger. But this seemeth to be an envious report uttered by those who were given to speak no good of him whom they inwardly hated . . . Verily, whosoever shall consider the course of the history written of this prince, he shall find that he hath been little beholden to the writers of that time in which he lived, for scarcely can they afford him a good word, except when the truth enforceth them to come out with it against their wills. The occasion whereof (as some think) was, for that he was no great friend to the clergy. [An account of King John's foundation follows this.]

"Divers of his enemies . . . interpret all his doing and sayings to the worst, as may appear to those that advisedly read the works of them that writ the order of his life, which may seem rather an invective than a true history; nevertheless, sith we cannot come by the truth of things through the malice of writers, we must content ourselves with this unfriendly description of his time. *Certainly it should seem the man had a princely heart in him, and wanted nothing but faithful subjects to have assisted him in revenging such wrongs as were done and offered by the French king and others.*

"[By exactions John angered the barons and incurred their hatred.] Which when he perceived,—he discovered now and then in his rage his immoderate displeasure, as one not able to bridle his affection, a thing very hard in a stout stomach, and thereby missed now and then to compass that which otherwise he might very well have brought to pass."

Stow, on the other hand, whose Annals were published two years later,

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makes John a usurper and villain.¹ In his enumeration of Henry's issue he writes:

"And John that after the death of his brother Richard, took on him the kingdom, disinheriting his nephews Arthur and Elianor the true heirs."

At the time of his accession the king is described as a person of indifferent stature but of melancholy complexion. Great storms are described as taking place at the time of Arthur's capture, then he is brought from Falaise to Rouen, in the care of Robert de Veypont "Where shortly after he was despatched of his life, some say by the hands of his Uncle John." The disgust of the nobles is recorded and especially of John Courcy, who denounces John's "murderous vile mind, cowardliness, traiterous conditions and tyrannical government."²

Without defending papal power at all, Stow blames John wholly for the quarrel with Innocent, who resolves to disinherit John at the earnest representations by the Archbishop and Bishops of the enormous deeds he had done with great contumacy against God and His holy church. John turns now against one noble, now against another, "calling them jealous whose beds (as he bragged) he had defiled and deflowered their daughters." The chief cause of their war against him was his efforts against Maud or Matilda Fitzwalter and her poisoning.³ Fitzwalter becomes the barons' champion.

After the submission to Rome and the absolution, the barons demand the renewal of the Charter of Henry I and war breaks out again. John's death is attributed to grief or over-eating, the story of poisoning being told for the sake of completeness.

Richard is Stow's hero, described personally as the opposite of John; of cheery countenance and tireless energy. For John, ignoring the work of Bale and Holinshed and his own research, he accepts the traditional historical character that had maintained almost from his own time to Stow's writing. He skims lightly over the murder of the Breuses, whereas Holinshed feeling the deeper tragedy did not palliate the crime, because he was seeking a philosophical interpretation of John's character that should include the bad and the good, the strong as well as the weak. But Stow was content with the simple method of relegating John to the wholly black.

Holinshed's *Chronicle* is the chief source of the two plays of the *Troublesome Raigne of King John*.⁴ The influence of Bale's *Kynge Johan* is very strong in directing the emphasis; in which current events—the play was written probably in 1589 or 1590—also shared. John is still in this play predominantly the Protestant martyr; the war with France and with the barons is subservient to this motive; the Catholic Church is lewdly handled; and much made of John's poisoning. The French war is felt

¹He even makes him participate in the war against his father in 1173 at which time he was in reality only four years old!

²The story of Courcy is told in Holinshed's Ireland, but without the vituperation.

³The story is substantially that of the Dunmowe chronicle, which is cited in Stow's *Survey of London* (1598-1603) where the story is repeated.

⁴It does not belong to this paper to discuss the authorship of this play. I believe with Fleay, that Greene, Lodge and Peele are probable names and that it certainly was not written by Shakespeare.

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bitterly as one of the causes that forced John's submission to the Pope, an English king yielding to an Italian priest. Contemporary history was a strong incentive to the authors to carry on Bale's tradition; Catholic Spain had just been defeated and the Pope was using against Elizabeth that terrible general sentence of condemnation which had succeeded in overcoming John. Fleay pointed out the moral in the last line of the play:

"If England's peers and people join in one,
Nor Pope, nor France nor *Spain* can do them wrong."

This play does not however, make John an angel. He is guilty of Arthur's death. He has ordered Hubert to blind him; promises the barons to spare his life, but retracts the promise immediately, and is glad of Hubert's mercy only because of its political effect. One cannot trust his further intentions. Further, John is cruel in hanging Peter of Pomfret and unnecessarily vindictive in his war against the Church of Rome. After the excommunication Philip, with hardly a murmur, yields to Pandulph:

John: Obey the Pope, and break your oath to God?
Giv'st thou thy sword unto a prelate's hand?
Pandulph, where I of Abbots, Monks and Friars
Have taken somewhat to maintain my wars,
Now will I take no more but all they have——

For the rest

That will not follow John in this attempt,
Confusion light upon their damned souls."¹

He is his own accuser in the moment of his realization of Rome's triumph over England:

"Thy sins are far too great to be the man
T' abolish Pope and popery from thy Realm.

And in his dying speech he sums up a life replete with all the guilt the chroniclers had charged him with.

"Methinks I see a catalogue of sin
Wrote by a fiend in marble characters,
The least enough to lose my part in Heaven.

How have I liv'd but by anothers loss?
What have I lov'd, but wrack of others weal?
Where have I vow'd and not infringed mine oath?

Shameless my life and shamefully it ends
Scorned by my foes, disdained by my friends."

The play has so many motives that it is difficult to estimate John's character. Besides their fear of the church, the barons declare the death of Arthur and the banishment of Chester to be motives of their rebellion; the scene of their meeting at St. Edmunds Bury is presented, and their

¹Ed. King John. London and Glasgow, 1878, p. 32.

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vows to Lewis, also the French conspiracy led by Lewis and Melun. Arthur, who is not made a convincing character however, gives some justification to John by his stubbornness. A lengthy scene is required for establishment of Falconbridge as King Richard's son. He is primarily the comfort and help of John, and in that expresses the author's point of view, but also has to supply the comedy of the piece in his scenes with the monks,¹ and the force of these motives is obscured by the boisterous nature of his pursuit of Austria and by a hinted intrigue with Blanche. All these elements, it must be remembered, are only secondary to John's struggle against Romish Christianity.

It has been said that these plays in following Bale's tradition pervert history. It is true that events are foreshortened, that Philip's renewal of the war is made to depend solely on the excommunication; that John's submission is put after Lewis's invasion. But in the broad outlines the dramatists are faithful. John is overcome by French and Papal enmity combined, and, when he is playing these against each other, by the defection of the barons. I think we may rather say that history was too closely followed. The authors were afraid to make Arthur wholly innocent; put too much emphasis on the second coronation because history made much of it, confused the point at issue with the barons, and finally gave no dramatic presentation of John's character because they had no definite conception of it. John by the events of the play is a Protestant martyr and as such estimable; but in two final speeches, obscuring this presentation, he accuses himself of a long list of crimes, totally unrelated to the plot; and his character was as little understood and as little fused into a comprehensible whole as it had been in the contemporary chroniclers. It remained for Shakespeare to give to this enigmatic character an interpretation that included all the important traits and events in a single point of view, and to create an understandable John who was both victim and criminal.²

Shakespeare derived his plot for *King John* almost entirely from the *Troublesome Raigne*, welding the two early plays into a single drama, purged of everything unessential. The philosophy is his own, though the seeds of it are in Bale and Holinshed, and is developed from a more clear-visioned patriotism than his predecessors'. Ignorant of the nature of John's feeling for the Norman inheritance, and of the intricate relations to the two countries which divided the barons, Shakespeare yet rightly read John's career as a struggle against France, to which every other consideration was subordinate. The theme is sounded on the opening line of the play:

"Now, say, Chatillon, what would France with us?"

The political instead of the religious side of the Pope's interference is emphasized, and it is made clear that the excommunication affects John

¹The lewd scene of the discovery of the nun in the monk's chest, and so on, is not invented out of the whole cloth. One of the most frequent complaints in the chronicles is that John took away the priests' wives and mistresses and exacted ransom. It must be remembered—as the authors of the play did not know, or chose not to remember—that the quarrel over celibacy was even then going on, and celibacy was not yet established in England in spite of many decrees.

²In the comparison of Shakespeare's play with the *Troublesome Raigne* and with the later historical plays, I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Horace Howard Furness, Jr., for a very helpful bibliography and for the generous use of his library.

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only by its influence on the French war. He learns the lesson and resolves to bring this power to his side. He *voluntarily* yields his crown immediately exclaiming to Pandulph:

"Now keep your holy word; go meet the French."

Every change from his source that Shakespeare made was for a greater dramatic effect and finer dramatic truth of character. The *Troublesome Raigne* gives John the right to the throne by Richard's will. Shakespeare, letting Elinor quote the will, makes her say privately that might, not right, is at stake. He realizes, what the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* had put so vividly, that it was not a question of technicalities, but of a choice between an English king however bad and a king under French influence. That is emphasized in the wrangling of Elinor and Constance. The tragedy arises because the barons do not realize it, and because John's realization is obscured by personal ambition. Greedy fear undermines his better judgment and he becomes guilty of a crime that defeats its own end. He dies in agony believing the cause hopelessly lost. The Bastard Faulconbridge who alone sees the issue clear throughout, who remains true to John as the representative of a principle, even in his horror at the murder of Arthur—for he with the others doubts Hubert's word—in the end proclaims the triumph of a united England.

In the *Troublesome Raigne* the importance of Arthur's confinement and death—which from the time of the *Philippidos* has been marked as the pivot of John's career—is obscured by the multiplicity and confusion of motives. Shakespeare in making it the focus of the action at once creates a great dramatic plot, and does not do violence to a larger historical truth. The invention of the device of Arthur's fall and the barons' finding of his dead body which belongs to the older dramatists, is a masterly method of representing dramatically the spreading of belief in John's guilt, in spite of his technical innocence. Shakespeare enhanced the effect of this, as of the whole plot, by his power to create Arthur really a child, and by his making him absolutely innocent. Surely the sacrifice of historic accuracy is of no account here. Philip is made better than he was when he yields to Pandulph because his weaker intellect is convinced, not because he is fickle, and Lewis, who is important because of his invasion, is made the real leader of the French. The play gains immensely in dignity by the omission of the lewd abuse of the Catholic clergy, while the patriotic feelings of the audience were satisfied when Pandulph was shown a sophister and schemer ready to sacrifice Arthur and Lewis in turn to his master's ambition. There is dramatic justice in the triumph of England after John's death, because Lewis and Pandulph are in a way as guilty of Arthur's death as John is.

Mr. Masfield says of the character of King John in the play: "He has a bigger intellect than any one about him. His brain is full of gusts and flaws that blow him beyond his age, and then let him sink below it."¹ His intellect is shown in his military genius, in his moral vision of a free England and a pure religion that so easily transcends Pandulph's sophistry, in his large plan of kingship. But all this is marred by selfishness. If he had not been selfishly afraid he would have seen the better

¹Shakespeare—Home University Library Series, p. 78.

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safety in generosity to Arthur. His selfishness tries to blame Hubert for Arthur's death; his very selfishness after the barons have left him clears his vision so that he sees himself as he is, damned. His guilty conscience hampers all his later efforts. He is broken from that moment. The true tragedy of the play is in the contemplation of a great mind, a spirit meant to do great things, helplessly limited by the effects of its own sinfulness and passion.

IV. The Romantic Plays

We have already noticed a tendency to blacken John's character in contrast with Richard's. Though the literary record of the development is meagre, doubtless much was said and sung before the motive reached its climax in 1598 in the Robin Hood plays of Munday and Chettle. These two plays, *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*, by Munday, and *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington*, by Munday and Chettle, combine four themes: First, the exploits of Robin Hood; secondly, John's strife with Ely and plot to secure the throne during Richard's absence; thirdly, John's love for Matilda Fitzwalter and the resulting war; finally John's strife with the Breuses. A third play on Richard's death is lost. The theme of John's love for Matilda had been treated in 1596 by Drayton in his *Legend of Matilda*; and the *Heroical Epistles* in the next year contained a letter from John to Matilda, and her answer. The former poem is a decorative account by Matilda of the king's wooing, and her own steadfastness and poisoning; neither of the characters has any distinct individuality; they might be any hot lover and any chaste maid. John's letter to her in the *Heroical Epistles* is the usual love-sick stuff, lacking colour, urging her to yield and bring back her father and friends whom grief of love, not hate, has banished. Her reply is more vigorous. Several verbal parallels show that the dramatists knew these two works.

The first play opens with the pronouncement of a sentence of banishment against Robert, Earl of Huntington, on the eve of his betrothal feast to Marian, daughter of Lacy. In spite of the machinations of John, who loves Marian, and of Elinor, who loves the Earl, the two escape to the woods, where they form an outlaw band. It is in the articles of the band that Robert shall be called only Robin Hood, and his love—who somehow has become Matilda, daughter of Fitzwalter—Maid Marian, in token of her chaste life. To them in the greenwood come old Fitzwalter, compelled to flee because he will not help John win his daughter, and the Chancellor Ely, who has been driven out when John, with his mother's help, assumes the throne. Finally when Leicester and Richmond announce Richard's return, John himself, having no other avenue of escape, goes disguised to Sherwood, where he is recognized and magnanimously treated by Robin and Marian. Through Robin's mediation, Richard is brought to forgive John, the outlaws being restored to their places.

Robin Hood was one of the favorite subjects of the early drama, and several fragments of early plays about him remain, in which, however, he is the simple outlaw at war with the Sheriff of Nottingham, and belongs to no particular reign. This is true of all the old ballads likewise, those in which he is an Earl and follower of Richard being *taken apparently from this play*. The authors felt that they were archaizing in presenting this subject and so they represented it as a rehearsal for a performance before Henry VIII of a play written by Skelton and Sir John Eltham, who act Friar Tuck and Little John. Their recognition that they were also doing something wholly new with the subject impressed upon them the advisability of apologizing to the audience. At the end of the

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fourth act accordingly, after Ely has been received and comforted by Robin, Skelton and Sir John step out of their parts for the following dialogue:

Lit. John. Skelton, a word or two beside the play.

Friar. Now, Sir John Eltham, what is it you would say?

Lit. John. Methinks, I see no gests of Robin Hood,
No merry morrices of Friar Tuck,
No pleasant skippings up and down the wood.
No hunting-songs, no coursing of the buck.
Pray God this play of ours may have good luck,
And the king's majesty mislike it not.

Friar. And if he do, what can we do to that?
I promised him a play of Robin Hood,
His honourable life in merry Sherwood.
His majesty himself surveyed the plot,
And bad me boldly write it, it was good.
For merry jests, they have been shown before,
As how the friar fell into the well
For love of Jenny, that fair bonny belle;
How Greenleaf robb'd the Shrieve of Nottingham,
And other mirthful matter full of game.
Our play expresses noble Robert's wrong;
His mild forgetting treacherous injury;
The abbot's malice, rak'd in cinders long,
Breaks out at last with Robin's tragedy.
If these, that hear the history rehears'd,
Condemn my play, when it begins to spring,
I'll let it wither, while it is a bud,
And never show the flower to the king."¹

John in this play, appearing as the betrayer at once of the two popular heroes Richard and Robin Hood, is a character of unrelieved evil. His licentiousness is portrayed in his effort to use even her father as pander in his pursuit of Matilda; his rude and fierce temper in his reviling of Elinor and brutality to Ely's messenger after Marian's escape, and in his dismissal of Warman for Ely's escape; his ruthless cruelty in the passionate stabbing of Hugh Lacy. On the other side, his cowardliness in the splendid scene in which Leicester comes to demand Richard's ransom and tells the story of his victories and Richmond proclaims the king's return, presents dramatically the character for weakness and lack of tenacity in the face of strong opposition, which many of the early historians represented as his. This scene, which is the climax of the play, gleams with the beauty of the combined dramatic imagination and creative power that amid much dross seem never wholly to have deserted the Elizabethan playwright. It presents vividly concentrated the contrast which forms the background of the play as Leicester gives a recital of Richard's exploits which the audience must have thrilled to hear and

¹Act IV, sc. 2.

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John, so bold in villainy against his inferiors, slinks off with hardly a word. John's character in the play, though so bad, is interesting because it is drawn with energy and dramatic truth to its conception. Of the shift of Marian's position and the dropping of the Lacy theme we shall speak later.

In the sequel to this play, the *Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington*, Henry Chettle collaborated with Munday and the change is marked in the spirit and compactness of the play. Act I is really a play by itself, little and lovely, which describes the treacherous poisoning of Robin Hood by two men to whom he had shown the greatest generosity. Much poetry graces it. Robin is the Christian hero and gentleman. John, who after his recent reconciliation to Richard plays the hale-fellow-well-met, sincerely promises the dying Earl never more to pursue Matilda. The Act is followed by an induction recalling John's promise to Robert and marking the passage of time over Richard's death and John's establishment, closing with three visions. In the first of these, John puts aside Ambition who is offering him the realm of Austria, and holds fast England only. In the second, he easily overthrows Constance and Arthur though they are aided by Insurrection, led by the French king, and Hugh le Brun. The third shows him oblivious of the appeal of the queen and their two children, starting up in pursuit of Matilda.

The play beginning with Act II is as follows:

John in spite of his better resolutions determines to win Matilda. Knowing, however, that his pursuit of her will unite the barons against him, he decides to take hostages from them. In accordance with this determination he sends his queen, who is passionately jealous of Matilda, to Guilford, to demand the younger son of Lady Bruce. Being also moved by greed for the possessions of Bruce's high-minded wife, who has sent the queen a gift of "four hundred white milch kine and ten like-coloured bulls," he sends Hubert after to seize her castle. She refuses to give her son to the king who had murdered Arthur, but the boy is found, and they are taken to Windsor. John meanwhile has seized Matilda. Young Bruce eager in her rescue because he is the nephew of Fitzwalter, with the help of his equally ardent father, succeeds in taking her, but Old Bruce is slain. When he hears of her loss, John, vowing vengeance on the Bruces, orders Lady Bruce and her son to be locked in a dungeon without food. Fitzwalter takes the field against John. Matilda being again captured by Hubert, persuades him in the name of his mercy to Arthur to let her go to Dunmowe. Failing to tempt her there through the wiles of a monk and an abbess, John banishes Fitzwalter and sends Brand—the jailor of the Bruces—to poison her. Young Bruce takes Windsor, where he finds his mother and brother dead. Matilda's body is brought there. The barons moved by these things are about to summon Lewis, but are persuaded that as a Frenchman he can never mean them well. John after trying to accuse the Bruces of starving themselves, is moved to true repentance when at last all hope of Matilda is gone, lamenting that his executioner had been too quick for the mercy he intended in each case. These are the essential outlines of the story, though there are interwoven references to a previous rebellion of the barons under Fitzwalter, and intricate political complications.

The influence of the historical plays is strong in this work.¹ To them may be attributed the visions of Austria and Arthur and the emphasis, at the end, of the French and English question; the weak attempt of John to fasten his guilt on Brand reflects his passionate accusation of Hubert in *King John*. In the new romantic element John's abandonment to love and Matilda's spirited conduct at her death follow the outlines of Drayton's *Legend of Matilda*. To these sources the authors reacted differently, and one can trace the work of two hands in the creation of John's character in its inconsistency. For he seems in one part of the play truly moved to better thoughts and resolved to return to Queen Isabel—whose jealous abuse of Matilda, together with Matilda's angelic patience, takes up a large part of the play—; at another only a dissembler and unredeemable villain. The deepest persistent impression of him is of a man utterly blinded by the passion of love. The authors are not at one as to whether he is a man of upright impulses, not too strong, sincerely but unavailingly struggling against that force, or whether he is thoroughly bad, in this instance only adding one more to many examples of ruthless self-indulgence.

The Lacys, as we noted, disappeared after the second act of the earlier play. Walter de Lacy² was in fact the son-in-law of William de Breuse. So that the relationship between *Marian* and the Breuses was real, though not just that of the play. The plot was probably originally outlined in that way. But at some time, perhaps at the beginning of the work upon the second play, the author, or authors, conceived the idea of linking the two stories more closely by making the Matilda Fitzwalter of the barons' war and the Marian of the Robin Hood story one. Stow in his *Survey of London* gives Fitzwalter's descent thus: Robert of Clare, to whom Henry II gave Dunmow and Baynard's Castle had a son Walter who married Matilda, daughter and co-heir of Richard de Lucy. The Robert of our story was their son. Thus the similarity of names of Fitzwalter's mother and the Lacys made the confusion easy; and Marian's relationship to the Breuses, which knits the themes together so effectively, was preserved.

The story of Lady Bruce's death depends chiefly on Holinshed. Young Bruce in the play thus describes it:

Where sits my mother, martyr'd by herself,
Hoping to save her child from martyrdom?
Where stands my brother, martyr'd by himself,
Because he would not taste his mother's blood?
For thus I gather this: my mother's teeth and chin
Are bloody with the savage cookery
Which her soft heart, through pity of her son
Respectless made her practice on herself;

My little brother's lips and chin alone
Are tainted with the blood; but his even teeth
Like orient pearl or snow-white ivory,
Have not one touch of blood, one little spot.

¹Probably we should not have had the repulsive scene in which the abbess and the prior try to tempt Matilda, had it not been for the *Troublesome Raigne*.

²In the *Histoire des Ducs de Normandie*, Hugh.

It seem'd he did not cry.
Few tears stand on his cheek, smooth is each eye;
But when he saw my mother bent to die
He died with her.¹

Holinshed² tells her story thus: "We read in an old history of Flanders, written by one whose name is not known, but printed at Lions by Guillaume Rouille in the year 1562"—that Matilda had sent the queen a gift of four kine and one bull, white except for their red ears—"Touching the death of the said lady, he saith that within eleven days after she was committed to prison here in England, she was found dead, sitting betwixt her son's legs up against a wall of the chamber, wherein they were kept with hard pittance."

From the very close resemblance of this description it seems likely that the anonymous Flemish history was the *Histoire de Ducs de Normandie et des Rois d'Angleterre*.³ The description in the play of the torn cheek and chin tempts one to believe that the dramatists also knew this work independently of Holinshed.

Looke About You, 1600, has an earlier position in the cycle than the Munday and Chettle plays. It takes place during the reign of Henry II and portrays Robin Hood, Earl of Huntington, as the ward, chamberlain and bed-fellow of Richard. Two main themes run through it; the rebellion of Henry's sons under the young king, and Richard's *unsuccessful* pursuit of Lady Falconbridge, with which are intermingled a great deal of comic intrigue and farce. Richard is the hero, noble in his conduct to his father, magnanimous to John, honestly relinquishing his designs on Lady Falconbridge in the end. John is greedy of power, hot-tempered, cruel, revengeful, insolent to the barons and to his father, lustful. To Richard who tries to restrain him his conduct is particularly rude and his tone mocking. The closing scene suggests what his conduct will be, and how his mother will help him, when Richard is king. The play is incoherent, mingling true dignity in some scenes with the greatest coarseness and impossible farce in others. The fact that John is given a rather large part, though he helps the progress of the plot very little, demonstrates how generally interesting his character was, and at the same time shows how completely the villainous conception of it had triumphed in spite of the work of Bale, and the historical plays which followed him.⁴

Robert Davenport's *King John and Matilda*, written about 1623, used for its avowed source *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington*. It is a more correct play than its precursor, and has far more historical accuracy, but infinitely less of life. The play opens with the barons, with Fitzwalter at their head, in revolt against John, "He being at Rome put from his kingly office." The attack upon the Bruces is determined upon from political motives, John's love for Matilda being only secondary. The barons upbraid John for headstrong conduct in respect to his continental losses, and Fitzwalter adjures him to *stand by the Charter* given June 17,

¹Act V, sc. 2.

²Ed. London 1807, Vol. 2, p. 301.

³Edition London, 1807, Vol 2, p. 301.

⁴It would be tremendously interesting in this connection to have the lost *Historie of Lord Faulconbridge*, S. R. Nov. 29, 1614, of which a 1616 copy was seen by Malone.

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1215. John by the advice of Hubert submits to Pandulph, and the barons seeing themselves trapped, would send for Philip, but are persuaded by Fitzwalter to summon Lewis instead. Brand, the custodian of the Bruces, is made by Davenport entirely responsible for their murder and John actually sends a messenger to stop him from killing Matilda, though too late. Young Bruce kills Brand and the barons see John so truly repentant that they unite to expel Lewis.

By one device of the plot Fitzwalter drops a glove which Hubert picks up, and uses to entrap Matilda into John's power; a use of a token under false pretences which seems to me not improbably to have been suggested by the story of John and Eustace Vesci's wife in Walter of Heminburgh and Knighton.

The attempt to rehabilitate John's character by whitening his part in the stories of Matilda and of the Bruces is not successful. Davenport does not secure our interest and sympathy as the fiery and energetic Chettle and Munday could, chiefly because he lacks imaginative power to create the figure he has conceived. John is described by young Bruce as eager in his passions of love and anger, but except at the end, in the actual delineation he never rises beyond conceiting. The biggest passion of which he is capable on hearing the news of the loss of Matilda in one of the chances of war is thus expressed:

"What are our hopes!

Like Garlands pon affliction's forehead worn,

Kissed in the morning and at evening torn;"

and his soliloquy after he has ordered her death speaks for itself:

"All my blood turns, she is now past all recovery.

Oh day, draw in thy light

Oh let no chaste maid

(Rememb'ring how Matilda was betrayed)

With bitter tears curse the too cruel King;

No satyr dance this day, no sweet bird sing,

But let the Raven and the Screech-Owl cry—

Matilda, the chaste maid, must this day die."

Major's *Historia Majoris Britannie*, published at Paris in 1521, is the first document to put Robin Hood in the reign of Richard¹—in a statement limited by "ut auguror." Stow quoted him in full. Holinshed in his *England* referred to him in a single sentence;² Grafton in his *Chronicle*, 1569, after giving the gist of Major, adds, "In an old and ancient pamphlet I find this written of the said Robert Hood. This man (saith he) descended of a noble parentage, or rather being of a base stock and lineage was for his manhood and chivalry advanced to the noble dignity of an Earl. But afterwards he so prodigally exceeded in charges and expenses that he fell into great debt. . . . so that by order he was outlawed." He was never caught, but was betrayed and bled to death by the prioress of Bricklies.³

¹Child says that Major probably had before him a ballad of Robin Hood and Richard. The ballads locate the hero in the reigns of various kings from an Edward to Henry VIII.

²The description of Ireland in an account of a monument named for Little John puts Robin's death and the dispersal of his band in 1189.

³Grafton—Edition London, 1809, Vol. 1, p. 221.

These so far as we know are the only sources for the nobility of Robin Hood and the strife with John, as they appear in the plays. The *Gest of Robin Hood* told of the strife with the Sheriff of Nottingham, of a visit played by the king (in disguise) to Sherwood, and of his taking Robin Hood into his favor. Marian does not appear in this or any early ballad in connection with Robin. She seems early to have been a man in woman's dress who, like Friar Tuck, attended the Morris dancers. Robin Hood of the ballads might be attached to the king in whose reign the ballad was written or to any king who pleased the writers. The forest laws of Henry II, Richard and John were particularly grievous, and John is noted for encouraging the sheriffs to overstep even their enormous rights. Richard's re-establishment on his return from the Crusade centred about Nottingham, from which place, according to Hovenden, who is quoted by Holinshed, he *rode out to visit the forest of Sherwood and Clipstone*¹; and the obscure annalist of Burton says that Richard was not at first known to be in person at the siege of Nottingham. These hints would, it seems to me, be enough to confirm a version that put Robin at this period, particularly as Richard was such a popular hero, and the magnanimity of the king of the *Gest* a quality peculiarly fitted to him. Moreover, when the knight in the *Gest* is asked what he will do if he loses all his money:

"Hastely I wol me buske," sayd the knight,
"Over the saltë see.
And se w[h]ere Criste was quyke and dede,
On the mount of Calverë."

So great was the Richard myth in later times that I believe any pilgrimage to the Holy Land would tend to attach itself to his reign.

Whatever the reasons, when the Elizabethan dramatists came to work upon the theme, Robin Hood was definitely established in Richard's reign. The prominence of Nottingham in both the historic and the romantic stories would suggest the introduction of John as a factor. Another factor, not so easily explained, is the title of nobility, for the resolution of which the question immediately suggests itself, who was in fact Earl of Huntington at this time? When in 1184 Simon of Huntington died, Henry II gave the Earldom to William of Scotland, who conferred it upon his brother David. This David having been active in his brother's war against Henry in 1174 was for a brief period a hostage at the English court for the fulfillment of the terms of peace. In virtue of his Earldom, he was after 1184 active in English affairs, and was chief of the forces besieging Nottingham on Richard's behalf when the king returned; and one of the doubtful barons at John's accession to the throne. His wife was Matilda, sister of Randolph, Earl of Chester. He died in the reign of Henry III—so far history. There are also indications, tantalizingly slight, that he was a popular hero of song and story. Hector Boece tells a story about him that is credited and retold in detail in Holinshed's *Scotland*; David, Earl of Huntington went with Richard to the Holy Land, and took the city of Acon. On the way home he was shipwrecked,

¹The *Sloane MS.* life says that Robin inhabited Sherwood or Clōpton. Ritson makes this a mistake for Plompton—which other later writers give as one of his haunts. If it be so, the change was perhaps influenced by the Clipstone of Hovenden and Holinshed.

made a slave in Algiers, finally escaped to Venice and so to Flanders and at last landed at Dundee. While he was in jeopardy at sea he vowed a church to the Virgin if he were saved, in fulfillment of which vow he built the church of White Cross at Dundee. He and his brother then rode to London to welcome Richard when the latter returned from the Crusade and captivity.¹ If we consider in connection with these facts the Robin Hood legend we find that the earliest mention of Robin Hood anywhere is in a line from *Piers Plowman* where Sloth says that he knows "rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf, Erle of Chestre." The ballads of Randolph Earl of Chester are lost, but Child comments on this reference, "Either Randle, the second, earl from 1128 to 1153, or Randle the third, earl from 1181 and for fifty years, would be likely to be the subject of ballads, but especially the latter."² If David Earl of Huntingdon was a popular hero, he might easily after some time become connected with ballads of Randolph Earl of Chester, whether that hero had originally been his brother-in-law or only bore the same name. And thus possibly he would become confused with the other and greater ballad hero, Robin Hood. *The Ballad of the Noble Fisherman or Robin Hood's Preferment*³, in which Robin takes a French ship and dedicates the treasure to the founding of house for the poor, together with Robin's devotion to the Virgin, may be compared with the story of David's return from the crusade. For Robert Earl of Huntingdon's betrothal to Marian we may call to mind that Meres, in his *Palladis Tamia*, called Anthony Munday "our best plotter." These suggestions are too meagre and the connections too slight to establish anything, but they do, I think, offer an interesting glimpse at probable explanations of Robin's development in dignity and connection with the court and John.

¹Stewart's metrical translation of Hector Boece L 44010 ff. From the hint of this story Scott made David the romantic hero of his crusade novel, *The Talisman*.

²Ballads. III. 40 n.

³Child III. 211.

V. Final Developments

In 1735, when there were some fears of an invasion by the Pretender and of a restoration of Roman Catholicism, Colley Cibber, thinking that there was scarce anything in the historical plays that might better have engaged Shakespeare's genius than "the flaming contest between his insolent holiness and King John," and being surprised that "our Shakespeare should have taken no more fire at it," resolved to "inspirit his King John with a resentment that justly might become an English monarch, and to paint the intoxicated tyranny of Rome in its proper colours." He endeavored incidentally to make *Papal Tyranny* more like a play than Shakespeare's work. John is very fiery and spirited indeed and the Pope very worldly. Pandulph in a soliloquy admits Falconbridge's assertion that John's submission is accepted for the sake of temporal power, John being needed as a check against France. In the last act, Arthur's bier, followed by Constance, crosses the stage. John is brought in dying, but the barons' grief is assuaged because he has had enough sense to ratify their Charter. Constance, hearing that he did not really murder Arthur, forgives and prays for him! Cibber's attempt is chiefly interesting because by the indignation it aroused it brought Shakespeare's *King John* back on the stage.

Ducis produced in Paris in 1791, *Jean Sans-Terre, ou La Mort D'Arthur*, Tragedie en trois actes. He explained that he made the prince perish by his uncle's hand because in fact the perfidious and barbarous king stabbed him himself and it was impossible to belie history in a fact so well known. "But," he says, "I thought I ought to punish him in some way in having his sad and terrible death announced by Hubert. I have followed Shakespeare in the manner of his death." Ducis had Hubert spare Arthur but a second executioner blind him. Constance in the disguise of a Breton woman has access to the blind boy, who recognizes her voice in a scene meant to have been very powerfully pathetic. In the strife to which the Bretons are roused, John (off stage) kills both Arthur and Constance. John appears very little in the play, whose second title better describes it. Where he does enter he is the melodramatic villain triumphant.

John was too dark a figure to do more than hover about the farthest outskirts of Peacock's exquisite idyll of youth and the forests. He is a bogie that casts a momentary shadow, but is happily suppressed. Scott's portrait of him in *Ivanhoe* presents with animation the true historic figure though he does not introduce the question of its being Arthur rather than Richard himself whom John wishes to supplant, in extenuation of his treachery. The personality, the psychology, what intimations of power the early years gave, are there faithfully represented.

Mr. Noyes in *Sherwood* dramatizes once more the story of John and Robin Hood and Matilda. Adding fairy elements, he makes it an allegory of the return of the Great King, Christ, to restore the world. John who represents the spirit of evil, does not carry conviction, because his psychology is too puerile both in love and crime. Most of the other characters have the indefiniteness to which so marked an allegorical tendency leads. The play holds our interest rather because of the poetry by the way, particularly in several lyrics, than because of any revelation of life or man.

Conclusion

John was a character in whom certain clearly marked external aspects obscured the subtle complexities of a powerful mind. He was a military genius and a politician of insight, but at the same time absolutely uncontrolled in his passions of greed, anger, lust. He seems not only to have been ruthlessly cruel, but to have delighted in the wanton infliction of suffering. Not even the exigencies of his large purpose could restrain the immediate expression of his temper, though his hatred never blinded his judgment of men. He showed a savage joy at the death of Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, yet during his life used him because he knew him valuable; so likewise in the case of Stephen Langton at the time of Magna Charta. When he had abused William the Marshal for legitimate transactions with Philip and no less legitimate protection of the Breuses he risked a loyalty invaluable to him by his unfairness in all that concerned Ireland and then goaded the Marshal to desperation by his cruel lies; and yet, when he was in the greatest need, though his eyes had seemed blinded by hate, he knew that he could trust him, and did. The historians saw him ravaging the country instead of facing the barons and, not recognizing a new and more advanced method of warfare, called it cowardice and mere savagery. They saw him leading a life of ease, while Philip was taking Normandy—what wonder then if they failed to understand a deeply tenacious purpose beneath his apparent indifference, since they also failed to recognize the true nature of the struggle and its real difficulties. Under John many elements of strife that had been at work in the reigns of his predecessors came to a head as the result of forces largely independent of his control. His exactions were no greater than those of Henry and Richard, but they were the last straw, and he was blamed. He demanded no prerogatives in church matters that his predecessors had not had, but Innocent, reaching out for new powers, saw John vulnerable; and John was perhaps the only man of his time besides the Pope who realized the true nature of that strife. He was even more bent than Richard on the Norman and Angevin inheritance, but Richard's failure to recognize the importance of England in the struggle had let grow to unsurmountable proportions the weakness of barons interested in both countries, a weakness which Philip was quick to use. John was more oppressive to the barons only because more clever in finding ways of oppression. But their opportunity was given them in the other attacks upon John.

Thus it is clear that the many aspects of John's character and career lent themselves to widely different interpretations. Historians of his own time whose knowledge covered only a portion of his reign, or who had not the facts of his career in all its phases—as none had—who exercised unbiased judgment, arrived at such varied estimates as are found in Hovenden, Gervase of Canterbury, Roger of Wendover, Walter of Coventry. To the first of these, who hardly know him as King, he is weak, cruel and self-indulgent; to the second, who knows him only as king in England and before the barons' rebellion or the submission, he is, in spite

of the fight with Langton, a good king; Roger of Wendover, the third, had, of these chroniclers, the truest conception, but though he respected John for his stand against the French, he did not know the facts or the conditions clearly, and applying the weak judgment formed of him in that war to domestic affairs, denied John the blame and the credit of the vigorous schemes put into effect in England; Walter of Coventry, touching only the English side and that briefly, sees in him a strong English king who somehow came to grief by quarreling with his own men. These are the conceptions of men whose judgment is free. Even wider divergencies are found in men whose interest in particular aspects of John's reign colours their opinions. On the church side, Ralph of Coggeshall, being a pious Cistercian and seeing the members of his order suffer through John, was ready to believe and set down any other villainy he heard of the king. Matthew Paris, of a more vigorous temper, though he followed the dispassionate Roger of Wendover, spurred by his threefold wrath as a churchman to see the church spoiled, as a monk to see the Pope triumphant, and as an Englishman to see the land humiliated, gave to every fact its most damning interpretation and to every trait its darkest colour. The author of the *Magna Vita S. Hugonis* hated John for the sake of his hero and for himself who was exiled during the Interdict. Gerald of Wales, finally, as a churchman, as a disappointed courtier, and as a Welshman, failing at first to understand him came in the end to hate him most bitterly. Of Rigord and William the Breton writing as Frenchmen the former is indifferent to John, the later sacrifices his reputation to Philip's. For the minor chroniclers remote through distance or time what Bale contented is true, the Interdict is the outstanding fact of the reign to these churchmen and John will fare ill with them. Besides this, they know of the continental losses, though not of the effort to resist them, and of the Breuses' fate—not of any claim of Arthur's to the throne or of his murder, generally, and not of Magna Charta as a great political document. Since these actual facts are easier to grasp than subtle traits of character, John will be judged wholly worthless. To this estimate will be added the special animus of such chronicles as Margan and Dunmowe; and a man of romantic tendency like Walter of Hemingburgh will find newly invented stories to illustrate the evil character. Robert of Gloucester, a soberly inquisitive historian, shows but one change in the estimate of the lesser annalists; the touching fate of Arthur became universally credited as murder and the pity of it established a belief in his just claim to the crown.

Contemporary literature manifests the same grounds of judgment of John as the Chronicles, but from a more worldly point of view. Of the short poems two stand out, one in Provençal, by a most ardent anti-churchman listing John for the first time as a Protestant martyr; the other in Latin, written in England after John's death, judging him clearly but with charity, a hymn of a united England in the very spirit of Shakespeare almost four hundred years later. William the Breton, doubtless thinking he had done John sufficient justice in his *Chronicle*, felt free to use in the epic *Philippidos* all the falsification of story and vituperation of character that eulogy of his arch enemy and William's patron seemed to require. He gives the most evil account of Arthur's murder, the most

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evil of the oppression of the church, the most evil of John's personal cowardice and weakness. The noble *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, which is an independent historical estimate of John's reign as well as a splendid poem, most truly understands John's weakness and strength, and creates the most truly vivid character. The author is successful in this because his hero's share in John's life centred in the French struggle, which was the real centre of the life; because he had all the facts of that struggle to aid his intelligence; and because he was a real poet. The author of the *Histoire des Ducs de Normandie et des Rois d'Angleterre*, whose very probable position as a Flemish mercenary gives us the key to his judgments of John and of Fitzwalter and the barons, in his discursive and anecdotal narrative, sheds much light on John's unlovely personality.

With only two brief notices showing John as a popularly accepted villain intervening, literature jumps from these works to Bishop Bale's *Kynge Johan*. A Provençal poet had already put John forward as a martyr to Papal tyranny, and another had praised the bishops who stood by John. Bale, who was a diligent student of the old chroniclers, found in them ample evidence that proved John from the student's recently converted point of view, an advanced and lonely defender of true Christianity. Since he was right on this cardinal point, it was not unnatural to make him quite virtuous; and not difficult when all the other events of his reign included in the play were made details of his quarrel with Rome. The signing of Magna Charta was nothing pertinent to that quarrel, and the events following it showed John's submission in a light very discredit-able to a single-minded defender of Protestantism, so Bale omitted it.

Both of the historians who studied old sources at this time were influenced by Bale's interpretation, more especially Holinshed. He saw John's reign in its entirety in a way not possible to any of the contemporaries and strove to comprehend the personality behind the seemingly contradictory manifestations. Viewing the quarrel with Rome much as Bale had viewed it, he did not blind himself however to John's faults of temper and of policy. With Roger of Wendover, he saw that the French War was the central effort of John's career, but with a larger field of vision he realized the real impediments to success. In this his spirit is at one with that of the author of the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*. Stow taking a more romantic view of history, accepts the story of Matilda Fitzwalter, and with it the most unfavorable estimate of John's character in all that pertains to the story of Arthur and to the barons' war.

The two plays of the *Troublesome Raigne of King John* follow Holinshed in outline and Bale in spirit. Treating John's reign from his accession to his death, they emphasize unduly the importance of political motives on Rome's part in the church quarrel, while making John's motives all purely religious; and of this quarrel in determining other events. The course of events is greatly contracted as is necessary to a play and somewhat altered in sequence. The only invention is the finding of Arthur's body, which is a good dramatic way of representing beliefs important in their influence upon later events. Magna Charta, even if Bale had not set the example of omitting it, had no place in this piece. It marked no distinct epoch in John's career, events went on after it, after a brief respite, in a continuous train with those before. The great fault of this play is that the authors

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were afraid of history and reveal wickednesses of John's character because they are true, without being able to relate them to the plot, or make them dramatically effective.

Shakespeare rewrote these plays into a single play with no change of action except that he does not maintain John's legal right to the throne and that he makes the submission voluntary. But he shifts the emphasis completely, to a political one hinging on the French war; and with an entirely different philosophy whose origin is in Holinshed, he can make the good and evil elements of John's character equally important to the action. With the same patriotic spirit that animated the author of the poem on the taking of Lincoln, Shakespeare, though he disregarded a smaller truth in doing away with the ugly external details of John's character, and made him a far greater patriot than he really was, saw the true purpose of his life and the right seeds of its defeat.

The authors of the romantic plays followed the older historical tradition. Their figure is the John who tried to usurp Richard's throne and lustfully pursued Matilda. But their romantic imagination, especially Munday's, did not leave John a maudlin villain. Selecting the elements he needed for his play, that author created a very probable mixed figure from which Chettle in his share of the second play, *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington*, eliminated the better traits, but left it still dramatically true. These two plays are tremendously important in later literature, because they invented, seemingly, John's share in the Robin Hood story and the identity of Matilda Fitzwalter and Maid Marian. The outline of the Breuse story except its connection with the former they found ready to hand. *Looke About You* pictures the John whom it knows is going to do all that he does in the two preceding plays, but as he is not yet in power, shows only his vicious personality, without touching the more solid traits beneath, creating a figure which though its manifestations here are invented, is actually supported by many stories. Davenport, copying *The Death of Robert* in his *King John and Matilda* tried to make up in historic truth of detail for what he lacked in dramatic power. He enlarges to coarseness the fine human touches of his model, as, for example, the finding of Lady Bruce's boy in the basket, and weakens the dramatic conflict by lessening those results of guilty emotions which his predecessors were not afraid to face squarely. And he cannot create the passion-swayed man he imagines.

Colley Cibber in *Papal Tyranny*, having never apparently heard of Bale's play, endeavored, at a time when current events suggested it, to make Shakespeare's *King John* a better Protestant play. The Pope through his fit emissary Pandulph is made a thorough villain steeped in politics. The emphasis of the love story of Lewis and Blanche completes the destruction of the power of the original. Ducis in *Jean Sans-Terre*, cutting out everything but Arthur's struggle with John and fall, invents horrid additions to the already dreadful story, and turns John into a complete penny-thriller villain.

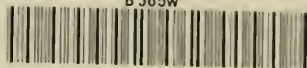
Thomas Love Peacock made the story of Robert and Marian Fitzwalter the centre of a lovely nature idyll in which John, whose character is however barely touched on, is accepted as the villain of the *D downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*. At about the same time Scott in *Ivanhoe*, in

King John in Fact and Fiction

which Robin Hood also appeared as the old ballad outlaw, was making an entirely independent study of John, and creating of all the literary presentations by far the most historically accurate personality. Mr. Alfred Noyes in *Sherwood* allegorized the Robin Hood-Marian-King John parts of the Chettle and Munday plays. King John is as thoroughly weak, cruel and vicious in conception as is the figure of popular story and history today, but in performance is not convincing. This is the last of the series of fictional portraits of John which end in conceptions so wide apart yet no one of which is pure invention; all of which have developed logically from contemporary historical estimates of a complex and difficult character, and find first tentative expression in contemporary literature.

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